PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 282

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1995–96

COMPRISING PERIOD
22 July—17 October 1996

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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 282**

SIXTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1995–96

House of Commons

Monday 22 July 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Deregulation

1. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the impact of deregulation initiatives on small businesses. [36746]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman): Our assessment is that the package of deregulation measures announced at the "Your Business Matters" conference on 11 March was widely welcomed by small businesses.

Mr. Spring: Given the assistance that has been given to so many small businesses by raising the VAT threshold, cutting corporate taxes and other methods of reducing bureaucracy on small businesses, is it surprising that there has been such a net expansion of small businesses? Given the importance of small businesses in job creation, will my right hon. Friend assure the House that, when he considers the deregulation initiatives, he will continue to take into account the needs of small businesses and continue to consult them widely?

Mr. Freeman: We shall certainly continue closely to consult small businesses. Our aim over the coming months is to continue the progress already made on simplification of PAYE and national insurance contributions; to ensure that enforcement of the law is uniform and proportionate; and to try to reduce the burdens of forms, surveys and licences on small businesses.

Mr. Grocott: While everyone would agree that it is desirable to cut unnecessary red tape, does the Minister agree that one discipline that must always remain is the proper keeping of accounts? Will he comment on last weekend's reports that some businesses contributing to the so-called Premier Club, which is a method of financing the Conservative party, have been advised to disguise their contributions by describing them as "entertainment"? If that practice exists, will he condemn it unreservedly?

Mr. Freeman: It goes without saying that all companies must observe not only the law relating to company accounts but the Inland Revenue's requirements. I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman would ask me about taxation. Some 500,000 small companies no longer need their accounts audited and more than half a million pay VAT annually.

Mr. Sykes: Has my right hon. Friend had time yet to assess the impact of the 48-hour week that is likely to be imposed on this country from 23 November onwards? Is he aware that Cleveland Potash, a fairly important employer in my constituency, told me that a 48-hour week would be disastrous for the company, and that it would have to lay men off as a result? What will the Minister do about the 48-hour week?

Mr. Freeman: Any restriction in terms of hours and patterns of work on companies' flexibility to employ staff is to be deprecated. The Government want our economy to achieve growth and prosperity, which comes about through limiting the burdens of social and employment legislation on our work force.

HMSO

2. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what revenue he expects to be raised from the privatisation of HMSO. [36747]

Mr. Freeman: I am confident that the sale will represent good value for money to taxpayers. However, the hon. Member will appreciate that I cannot jeopardise those benefits by releasing details of bids or estimated proceeds at this stage.

Mr. Cunningham: How can the Minister say that the sale will benefit taxpayers when his Department has estimated that it should be sold for £100 million and that it will get less than £50 million if it tries to sell it now? Should not the sale be put on freeze?

Mr. Freeman: Ministers have made no such estimate. The whole purpose of a competition for organisations or agencies that are being privatised is to determine best value for money. HMSO in the private sector can compete with the private sector for private sector business, and can expand without the constraints of operating in the public sector.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of the likely side effects of the privatisation of HMSO is that *Hansard* will be available on the Internet? Does this not demonstrate the Government's commitment to open government?

Mr. Freeman: With respect, I think that my hon. Friend is a little too enthusiastic about the Internet. I hope that public and private sector agencies—including the House, in due course—will consider the wider use of the Internet.

Mr. Garrett: Is the Minister aware that the three bidders for HMSO have shown precious little interest in expanding its sales in the private sector? Further, is he aware that it looks as though HMSO will be sold for half what was expected and that there are rumours that there will be 600 redundancies, mostly in the headquarters city of Norwich?

Mr. Freeman: The Government have consistently made clear that HMSO would have a further programme of redundancies in the public sector. From the responses of the short-listed bidders, I am not aware that they see matters any differently from the forecast by internal management. I have had meetings with the trade unions and I am well aware that the short-listed bidders are proposing more rapid attention to the financial problems of HMSO. The preferred bidder will be announced in the next few weeks and I hope that it will sketch out its aspirations and plans for HMSO in some detail. I hope that that will result in an expansion of work in the private sector, and therefore in employment prospects throughout the country.

Mr. Derek Foster: Is it not clear that the Chancellor is going to get only half the proceeds that he expected for HMSO and that 600 jobs will be lost, mostly in Norwich? Contrary to his stated reasons for privatising HMSO, is it not clear that all his preferred bidders are far more concerned to boost HMSO's puny 8 per cent. share of the £3 billion public sector market than to expand sales in the private sector? Has not the Government's stampede to privatise become a car boot sale of civil service jobs and a hand-out of public sector assets and contracts—including some to his fat cat friends who are payrolling the Tory party through the Premier Club?

Mr. Freeman: On employment prospects, the 600 jobs that the right hon. Gentleman referred to are, broadly speaking, within the forecast job redundancies in the public sector. As I understand it, there is no great difference between the forecast made by HMSO management and that made by those interested in acquiring the business.

On the question of business expansion, only in the private sector would a company have the ability to borrow and to invest without the constraints of the public sector and, therefore, to create more jobs.

Government Business

3. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what arrangements are in place for the co-ordination of Government business during the summer recess. [36748]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Michael Heseltine): The arrangements currently in place will continue to be operated throughout the summer recess.

Mr. Hughes: Well, that is a consolation. Is it not true that, a year after the Deputy Prime Minister's appointment as the co-ordinator of Government business, he has no more chance of co-ordinating business now than when he started? In fact, he cannot even co-ordinate Ministers to sing to the same tune. The Paymaster General has resigned over a disagreement with the Government on Europe. Is it not true that Government policy is still the same muddle and the same mess? The Government have at least four views on Europe: this year, next year, some time and never. It is a shambles.

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is refreshing to hear that there are four views in the Conservative party on this matter. My experience with the Liberal Democrats is that they have more than 20 views on every matter or policy—it depends on the time of day and the part of the country that one is in.

Mr. Wilkinson: As it is likely that the European Court of Justice will rule against the United Kingdom and require imposition of the working time directive during the summer recess, would it not be better for Her Majesty's Government to come to the House in advance of that with contingency plans by which we can maintain our social chapter opt-out in this sphere and not have it imposed on us?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the chance to clarify the position. As he and the House will know, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister secured an opt-out from the social chapter during the Maastricht negotiations. My right hon. Friend intends to make it absolutely clear to his colleagues in the European Union that that negotiation and deal must be

honoured. The fact is that my right hon. Friend will take up the matter during the intergovernmental conference, and that we are determined that it will be put right.

Mr. Skinner: In view of the fact that Ministers will not be answering questions during the parliamentary recess, does not that mean that, by and large, Ministers—including the Prime Minister—will be more available to meet people outside the House and to pick up money on the side? Therefore, according to the market-force philosophy, if Ministers are more available to meet the public and important business people—who are gaining patronage and power, and probably knighthoods and all the rest of it—does it not follow that their price should fall? What is the price of Ministers who resign? Would not it follow that a Minister who has just resigned from the Government should get a better price than a Deputy Prime Minister who is a failure?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The whole House will welcome the interest of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) in market economics. He has given me an opportunity to reflect on the fact that, fairly recently, to meet the leader of the Labour party, one had to pay £430 a head to go to the Savoy hotel. It has been suggested in some national newspapers that it is rather more expensive to meet my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, but I think that the relative difference between the figures is a reflection of the quality of the two individuals.

Mr. Thurnham: Will the Deputy Prime Minister bear in mind the need to continue co-ordinating Government policies to help restore Manchester's bomb-damaged city centre, and, in particular, to cover the extra costs of policing to maintain the very necessary security cordon?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend shares the House's deep interest in the opportunity that, tragically, has now been presented to our great city of Manchester. I have given an assurance that, on behalf of the Government, I shall do all that I properly and reasonably can. The announcement that we are to hold an international competition to attract the most exciting designs for the rebuilding of Manchester has attracted widespread public support from all political sectors and from the entire community. I am delighted that I should have had some small part to play in that.

Mr. Prescott: Given the Deputy Prime Minister's extraordinary powers of presentation and co-ordination—which today enabled him to announce on television the resignation of a Minister before the Minister had even handed in his resignation to the Prime Minister—can the Mystic Meg of the Tory party tell the House whether anyone else will resign in the next 24 hours? Now that the Paymaster General has resigned, does not the Deputy Prime Minister agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) that that resignation shows that the Tory party is constitutionally unable to row together—in other words, that the Government are deeply divided and totally unfit to govern, and that it is time that they went?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is quite quaint that the right hon. Gentleman should raise issues of membership of the Cabinet, the shadow Cabinet, the Government—or whatever it may be—on the very eve of the point at which a prominent member of the Labour party is to be kicked off the shadow Cabinet because she had the effrontery to follow the precedent set by her own leader.

Dr. Spink: In view of the excellent news that we have heard today about funding for the millennium from business, will my right hon. Friend ensure that all good news—on jobs, on interest rates and on inflation—during the summer recess is disseminated effectively to the country?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right on both counts. The economy is now moving into one of the most exciting expansionary phases that any of us can remember, and that good news—in jobs and in other opportunities—will increasingly flow through into people's pockets.

As for the announcement that I was able to make today, I am sure that the whole House will welcome the fact that five major city institutions—Barclays, National Westminster, Midland, Lloyds and Abbey National—have today authorised me to say that they will be supporting the millennium festival at Greenwich. They are as determined as I am that there will be a clear statement in the festival about the pre-eminence of the City of London as a world financial centre in this and the next century.

Deregulation

4. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the effects of his policies of deregulation or industrial competitiveness. [36749]

Mr. Freeman: Our policies to push forward deregulation and promote competitiveness are set out in the 1996 competitiveness White Paper, published last month. The White Paper has been widely welcomed by business, including the Confederation of British Industry, the Engineering Employers Federation and the Institute of Directors.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is not the inevitable consequence of the failure properly to regulate the destruction of not only competitiveness but the product itself? Is not that the core message that comes through the row over bovine spongiform encephalopathy?

Mr. Freeman: If the hon. Gentleman will look back to previous Labour Governments before 1979, he will find that the proposals then for draft legislation would not have affected the development of BSE, because they were to do with preventing salmonella. Developments in the rendering industry in the 1980s came about from a decision by the industry itself, not a failure to regulate or deregulate. The hon. Gentleman cannot in any way ascribe the tragic increase in BSE, and now its solution, to a failure to regulate or deregulate.

Dr. Hampson: Does my right hon. Friend make the assessment that educational performance is basic to increasing competitiveness, and that we have a long way to go in the primary sector? May we count on the speedy and extensive expansion of the network of literacy and

numeracy centres, which is one of the best initiatives that the Government have launched but which is as yet relatively unsung?

Mr. Freeman: I agree. The skills audit, which was a parallel exercise to the competitiveness White Paper, was valuable and revealing. It shows how far this country has to go in not only primary and secondary education but higher and further education. I understand my hon. Friend's point and will certainly convey it to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

Policy Objectives

5. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his monitoring of the effectiveness of the Government's policy objectives. [36750]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. David Willetts): The Government aim at combining economic dynamism with constitutional stability and to continue—in stark contrast to the Labour party—our success in communicating those objectives.

Mr. Miller: In light of the Minister's answer, what impact will the resignation of the Paymaster General have on the Government's ability to achieve their objectives? Will that stability emerge as a result of that resignation, or will it take more resignations before stability emerges?

Mr. Willetts: The Government will carry on communicating their messages about economic success and continue protecting the British constitution from the Labour party's batty and damaging agenda.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government's success in achieving their policy objectives was most recently emphasised by the huge inward investment in Wales announced in the last few days? Will we continue to see the successful implementation of Government economic policies, which could never have occurred if Labour's policies had been followed?

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend is right. More than 40 per cent. of all American and Japanese investment in Europe comes to this country, which is a vote of confidence in the Government's economic policies.

Competitiveness Unit

6. **Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the competitiveness unit in his Department. [36751]

Mr. Willetts: As the recent competitiveness White Paper showed, we are doing well in world growth league tables, and our productivity is improving strongly. The best evidence of our success is our record of attracting inward investment—most recently, the Lucky Goldstar plans to invest £1.7 billion in manufacturing in Newport—the largest single inward investment ever in Europe.

Mr. Touhig: The OECD's latest employment study warned that low pay and the lack of a highly skilled work force are combining to constrain our economic competitiveness. What are the Government doing about that?

Mr. Willetts: Our competitiveness White Paper shows that we have one of the lowest unemployment rates in Europe. In addition, within the Group of Seven we moved up from the fifth or sixth place on growth rates that we occupied in the sad days of the last Labour Government to third place in the 1980s. If the hon. Gentleman studies the White Paper, he will find the answer to his questions.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree that low pay is not the problem with Britain, but that no pay, through increased unemployment, would be the problem if we proceeded down the road to ruin with the social chapter, minimum wage and 48-hour directive that would be heaped upon us if the Labour party were elected to power?

Mr. Willetts: The pay of the average production line worker in this country compares very favourably with the pay that the equivalent worker would take home in Germany, France and Spain. The difference is that in Britain we have kept a grip on the extra costs imposed by Government, whereas in Germany, France and Spain, because of the social chapter, the extra costs imposed by Government are much higher. That is why Britain has lower unemployment.

Mr. Caborn: In view of what the Minister said about the OECD and the White Paper—which drew heavily on statistics from the OECD—does he agree with the OECD's statement that there is a link between our declining national competitiveness and the growth in wage inequality and job insecurity?

Mr. Willetts: I do not accept that there has been any decline in national competitiveness. The evidence assembled in successive competitiveness White Papers shows precisely that there has been a clear improvement in our position on growth per head compared with other advanced western countries. Of course, one in three of all those leaving school now go on to higher education, as against one in eight under the last Labour Government, which is significant evidence of how educational standards are improving.

European Union

7. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is his Department's role in the co-ordination of Government Departments in respect of publicising the impact of EU membership. [36752]

The Deputy Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has overall responsibility for co-ordinating the Government's policy towards the European Union, including the presentation of that policy.

Sir Teddy Taylor: On the day of the tragic resignation of a very sincere and truthful Minister, will the Government consider whether, in the national interest—and bearing in mind the deep divides on Europe in both parties—it might be best to resolve the issue by letting

the people decide for themselves, through a referendum, which way they wish to proceed in Europe? Would not that be the best way of co-ordinating policy and accepting the simple fact that the country belongs to the people and not to the political parties?

The Deputy Prime Minister: If my hon. Friend is suggesting that there should be a referendum on whether the United Kingdom should leave the European Union, which is how I understood his question, the answer is that that would not be compatible with Government policy. It is clearly the Government's policy that, in the over-arching and overall interests of this country, it is fundamental that we be a leading member of the European Union.

Mr. Dalyell: What can the Government or the Community do to publicise the guidelines on airport safety and the safety of aircraft, which were formulated after Lockerbie—and which, incidentally, were eloquently outlined in *The Sunday Telegraph*—so that at least some of the basic principles are implemented, which has not been the case so far? That question is especially relevant in view of the dreadful events in Spain and on the TWA aircraft.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman raises the latest tragic event in civil aviation. As yet, we do not know the precise causes of that tragedy. I shall certainly draw the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary to the hon. Gentleman's continuing concern in the context of the Lockerbie disaster.

Mr. Beith: How many Ministers are there left who share the view of the former Paymaster General about the Government's policy on a single currency? How many are there left who think that Britain's participation in the single currency is a genuine option? Are there enough of them to co-ordinate it?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has judged the Government's behaviour in the context of Liberal Democrat policy. The Government's White Paper has clearly set out our policy on the forthcoming intergovernmental conference. We have made wide-ranging statements on the fundamental issues relating to Europe. The Government's policy is perfectly clear. If a Minister cannot accept that policy, the honourable course is to resign.

Policy Objectives

8. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he next plans to review the presentation of Government policy objectives as they relate to his responsibilities. [36753]

Mr. Willetts: We regularly review our presentation of Government policies—the presentation of successes such as rising living standards, higher educational standards and a fall in the crime rate.

Mr. Hanson: When the Minister next takes the opportunity to review the presentation of Government policies, will he rule out their presentation to groups of business men in return for £100,000 donations to the Conservative party?

Mr. Willetts: I would be interested to hear whether the Labour party will rule out giving trade unions a clear say in its policy in return for direct contributions to party funds. Labour is the party that is funded by outside interests.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government's policy will be firmly to oppose the London Underground strike that is causing such misery to my constituents, the rest of the people of London and the economy? Has my hon. Friend noted that the Leader of the Opposition has made a feeble attempt to oppose the strike, and that the deputy Leader is said to have been so annoyed that he had to be scraped off the wall?

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend is quite right: we unreservedly condemn both the tube strike and the Post Office mail strike. The Labour party could do with rather better co-ordination on the matter.

Mr. Pike: Do the Minister and the Government continue to review the effect of the abolition of the wages councils, and the increased poverty and low pay that many people in Lancashire have had to suffer as a result of that policy?

Mr. Willetts: I am sure that the abolition of the wages councils is one of the many reasons why this country enjoys a much lower unemployment rate than countries on the Continent. If people are in low-paid jobs, it is much better to help them out with family credit than to introduce a minimum wage and ensure that they have no jobs at all.

Deregulation

9. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what amount of time he spent on promoting the policy of deregulation in the last month. [36547]

The Deputy Prime Minister: Promoting the need for fewer, better and simpler regulations is a constant theme of my daily work.

Mr. Marshall: What a wonderful tune.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the threat to jobs in the United Kingdom comes from the deregulated economies of south-east Asia? Does he agree that those tiger economies have prospered while jobs have disappeared in the regulated economies of western Europe? Does not the threat to jobs come from increased regulation in the form of, for instance, the social chapter and a national minimum wage—the new dangers from new Labour?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I entirely agree. Moreover, the privatisation programme that we have introduced has undoubtedly contributed to a great surge in productivity in British industry, with all the growth implications that that has. All the steps that we have taken to make ours one of the fastest-growing economies in western Europe, with the highest proportion of the work force employed, should be seen in the context of the Labour party's opposition to all of them.

Mr. Olner: While the Deputy Prime Minister is contemplating that, will he not tell the truth—that more regulatory legislation has been introduced under the present Government than any deregulatory legislation that he has ever introduced? Surely the truth is that there is now more regulation governing small business people than there was before.

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is possible to discuss such matters in sensationalised headline terms, and to give an entirely false impression of what has happened. If people recognise that, in order to complete the single market, we have had to harmonise and regulate 400 elements of an agenda that was designed to create the greatest expansion of trade opportunities that the country has ever seen, they will realise that it is often necessary to regulate to create a freer climate and a more harmonious background. If they also take into account the fact that most regulations that pass through the House have nothing to do with small businesses, and are often nothing more than measures to update or uprate existing regulations, they will realise that newspaper headlines can be constructed based on the flimsiest straw.

Competitiveness

10. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to improve competitiveness through increasing the availability and accessibility of information technology. [36755]

Mr. Willetts: The Government's plans are set out in the recently published competitiveness White Paper and include the DTI's information society initiative, which is providing £35 million of new money to help firms capitalise on new technology, and the recent announcement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster that a Green Paper will be published in the autumn on the Government's plans for information technology.

Mrs. Campbell: When the Deputy Prime Minister finally launches his "IT for All" strategy, perhaps he will remember that he pinched his best ideas from the city and county councils in Cambridge which, as a result of a successful public-private partnership, provide free Internet access through public libraries, council offices and citizens advice bureaux

Mr. Willetts: I welcome what is going on in Cambridge, which shows what can be done to spread information technology. Part of the secret of Cambridge's success—including, for example, the Cambridge interactive television trial—has everything to do with the favourable environment that the Government have created for cable television, which is threatened by the Labour party's proposed sweetheart deal with BT.

Mr. Jessel: Is information technology available and accessible in the Treasury? Can my hon. Friend comment on the position in the Treasury of Miss Helen Goodman, who at first denied and later admitted that she was seeking to become a Labour parliamentary candidate, showing that nothing that she has said can be believed, including her denial of knowing anything of the leaked documents that she had helped to prepare?

Mr. Willetts: That is a matter for internal Treasury management, which is considering the position.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Sudan

29. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much (a) bilateral and (b) multilateral assistance the Government (i) gave to Sudan in 1995–96 and (ii) plans to give to Sudan in 1996–97. [36801]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): While we have given no aid to the Government of Sudan since 1991, last year—1995-96—we spent an estimated £6 million bilaterally and in 1995 committed more than £2 million through multilateral agencies, including the European Union, on the emergency and short-term rehabilitation needs of the Sudanese people. We are ready to address such needs again this year as they arise.

Mr. Hunter: In the light of the linkage, which the Government sometimes stress, between overseas aid and civil liberty and human rights, will my right hon. Friend make an assessment of the situation in that respect in Sudan? To what extent is it influencing the Government's overseas aid programme there?

Mr. Hanley: As I said, the human rights situation in Sudan is extremely serious, but we do not give aid to the Sudanese Government. We are very concerned about human rights in Sudan. It was again condemned at the recent United Nations Commission on Human Rights. Allegations of slavery and genocide have, of course, attracted serious attention. We are also concerned about policies to prevent freedom of speech and the pursuit of Islamisation by force, which are equally unacceptable. The economic situation is dire, and life for ordinary Sudanese people is extremely hard.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

31. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what studies his Department has (a) commissioned and (b) evaluated on the effects of the GATT on agriculture in the poorest countries. [36782]

Mr. Hanley: In 1994, the Overseas Development Administration commissioned from the Overseas Development Institute a study on the impact of the GATT Uruguay round agreement on developing countries, including studying the effect on agriculture.

Mr. Corbyn: Would the Minister care to look carefully through the studies that his Department has produced and those conducted by Oxfam? Does he not recognise that, since the GATT agreement, there has been an increase in the export of cereals and other products from the EU and north America, heavily subsidised by taxpayers and often causing enormous ecological damage in both those areas, while farmers in third-world countries who do not enjoy such governmental support are being forced to compete with products whose prices they simply cannot match, and are therefore being pushed out of business? Is that not an

example of GATT working in the interests of the richest producers in the richest countries, to the detriment of the poorest farmers in the poorest parts of the world?

Mr. Hanley: I believe that lowering trade barriers, making more efficient use of resources and protecting the environment go hand in hand. The best way to tackle major environmental problems is through multilateral agreements, not unilateral trade actions. The World Trade Organisation is considering whether any further clarification of that is needed in international trade rules, although internationally agreed safeguards are in place to help to deal with the problems to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. The decisions commit us to examine the impact of agricultural settlements on countries that are net importers of food and to take appropriate action.

Mr. Wilkinson: Do not countless impartial studies demonstrate that the common agricultural policy of the European Union is extremely inimical to the interests of primary agricultural producing countries overseas and is a mechanism for their impoverishment? Would it not be a better use of taxpayers' money for Her Majesty's Government to announce to their partners at the intergovernmental conference that they intend not just to reform the CAP but to start its dismantlement by withdrawing?

Mr. Hanley: Although I agree with my hon. Friend that a reform of the CAP is necessary, I feel that the United Kingdom's membership of the EU helps to influence the Union, and I believe that our share of the EU's aid policy and our influence in it are desirable for poorer countries.

Miss Lestor: Does the Minister agree that there must be coherence between our aid and trade policies, including GATT? Bearing in mind the recent visit of Nelson Mandela, his tribute to those British people who campaigned for his release and the Prime Minister's promise to support South Africa in its trade negotiations with the EU, what proposals do the Government have to ensure that development objectives are high on the negotiating agenda, and that a realistic long-term timetable for reform—covering at least 10 years, as has been requested—is introduced? Will he ensure that all sectors of the South African economy are considered—particularly the health, housing and education, sectors in which there is urgent need for investment?

Mr. Hanley: On behalf of the Government, I thank the hon. Lady for her years of service on the Opposition Front Bench. I thank her also for her constant courtesy and for her great dedication to the cause that we are discussing. She will be sadly missed. This may, of course, be my last time at the Dispatch Box also. We have yet to see.

Mr. Prescott: Oh!

Mr. Hanley: One never knows, John.

As to the main matter, the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lester) is quite right, and we must seriously consider these matters. The Overseas Development Institute's recent report on the effect of the Uruguay round on developing countries and agriculture discovered that exports from the Association of South-East Asian Nations countries and India were expected to gain from the reduction in tariffs in OECD and other developing countries. But African, Caribbean and Pacific countries—the least-developed countries—may lose the equivalent of approximately 2 per cent. of export earnings in the short term, due to increased crude import prices and the loss of marginal preference to other LDCs for certain goods. We are looking at the report, and we will certainly consider what she said, as it is extremely important.

Third World (Development Projects)

32. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he has had with the United Kingdom representatives on the board of the World bank concerning its policies for financing development projects in the third world. [36783]

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development, who is also the UK alternate governor for the World bank, and her officials have frequent consultations with the United Kingdom executive director and his office.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister recall that, four weeks ago today, I inquired about the policies of the International Monetary Fund in respect of comparable investments? He kindly said that he would make inquiries, particularly with regard to the prejudicial effect of any of the IMF's conditions on Rwanda and former Yugoslavia that may lead to a stoking up of strife in those areas. If such allegations by the debt crisis network have any substance, will representations be made not only to our representative on the IMF, but to the World Bank on comparable activities in that organisation?

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for sending me the two appendices to which we referred the last time we discussed the issue. I read them and I have replied to him in a letter which he may by now have received. I have put a copy, as I pledged, in the Library. The G7 summit in Lyon at the end of June was a further step in the process of reaching agreement on the multilateral debt initiative. A copy of the communiqué has also been placed in the Library. We hope that final agreement can be reached at the World bank-International Monetary Fund meeting in October. We are working hard with our partners to that end. The British Government have written off the aid debts of 31 of the world's poorest countries, with a value of more than £1.2 billion. All our aid is now on grant terms. We are taking the lead in pressing for solutions to the debt burden of the poorest countries.

Sir John Stanley: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the World bank's valuable initiative to make a line of $200 million available for micro-loans to be targeted on the poorest of the world's poor? Given the critical importance to the very poorest of access to credit, will he give serious positive consideration to launching a similar initiative in the context of the British Government's bilateral aid programme?

Mr. Hanley: Again, my right hon. Friend is right. I am delighted that the World bank has offered $500 million from its net income this year as its contribution to the multilateral debt initiative, with the prospect of

substantially more in succeeding years. The IMF and the World bank have identified some eight to 20 countries as candidates for the initiative, which applies only to highly indebted, poor countries that have demonstrated commitment to economic reform.

Burundi

33. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's involvement in aid projects in Burundi. [36785]

Mr. Hanley: Britain has committed nearly £8 million in humanitarian assistance to Burundi since October 1993, including £2.9 million through our share of European Union contributions. We are ready to provide further assistance as needs arise.

Mr. Ainger: Does the Minister accept that a lot more may be needed in Burundi if we are to prevent a repetition of the tragedy of Rwanda? Has he seen the recent comments of Julius Nyerere, the former President of Tanzania, following his investigation in Burundi to try to find a resolution? Does he accept that Julius Nyerere suggests that the EU and the United Nations should become significantly involved in the internal affairs of Burundi and that otherwise the slaughter of 500,000 people that happened in Rwanda is likely to be repeated?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman is right to be deeply concerned about the recent deterioration in the political and security situation in Burundi. We read only this morning in the newspapers of the massacre of 300 Tutsis and of expulsions. It is a difficult and distressing situation. We condemn politically motivated violence, from whatever quarter. The solution to the problems requires the commitment of Burundi's leaders and the involvement of the international community, as he said.

We continue to work closely with the UN Secretary-General and his special representatives in the region and we strongly support the international efforts at preventive diplomacy, led by ex-President Nyerere. We contribute to the costs of his mission. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary of State and my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development met Julius Nyerere in London on 2 May to discuss ways forward. He recognises the immensity of his task and that durable solutions will require the agreement of the parties in Burundi.

Madam Speaker: That was a long answer—almost a statement.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Does the Minister agree that the World Service was particularly important in the transmission of accurate information during the tragedy in Rwanda? Would he confirm, as he has not yet done, despite two questions being asked, that the funding for that World Service network came largely from the voluntary organisations? Does he agree that the World Service needs to be supported and enhanced if it is to assist in tragedies such as that in Burundi?

Madam Speaker: Order. It is about time the hon. Lady came to the substantive question on the Order Paper. If the Minister wishes to answer, I think that the hon. Lady was referring to the World Service as it is received in Burundi. Is that correct?

Miss Nicholson: Yes.

Mr. Hanley: I am pleased to be able to say that the World Service will continue to be received throughout the world. Its efficacy in Africa is without question. The World Service carries an extremely important role in Burundi and further afield, and the Government support it—to the tune of more than 50 per cent. in real terms since we came to power in 1979.

Overseas Aid (Distribution Criteria)

34. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have occurred in the criteria governing the distribution of overseas aid in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [36786]

Mr. Hanley: There have been no changes in the criteria governing the allocation of bilateral aid; those remain the same as in my answer of 25 March, *Official Report*, 25 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. *416*. They are the needs of the country concerned and the effectiveness with which aid can be used. A number of other factors, including good government, the commitment of recipients to political and economic reform and traditional ties with Britain, are also taken into account. There are also our obligations to the multilateral organisations of which we are a member.

Mr. O'Brien: I appreciate the Minister's response. Agencies and people in receiving countries are concerned that the Government appear to be making changes, for example in some of the approaches being made to help countries in need. When agencies have worries, will the Minister try to erase any concerns that they express?

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the way in which he put his question. Obviously, aid cannot be ossified—either the level of aid or the recipients at any one time. One has to look to the needs of countries as they change. We maintain a substantial aid budget. It was more than £2 billion in 1996-97 and we were the sixth largest donor in the 1995 calendar year. We concentrate on the poorest countries, particularly those in Africa and Asia. They need aid, and it is therefore crucial that our bilateral programme concentrates on them.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Statisticians

38. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission how many statisticians were employed by the National Audit Office in each of the past three years. [36761]

Sir Peter Hordern (Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): The number of staff with degrees in mathematics and statistics in the National Audit Office at end of June was 28 in 1994 and 30 in

1995 and 1996. Full-time professional statisticians or operational researchers in post at the end of June numbered six in 1994, eight in 1995 and 11 in 1996.

Mr. Steen: That shows that the National Audit Office, which does a splendid job, is increasing its staff and the number of people on the public payroll. Will my right hon. Friend consider the possibility of the Audit Commission charging the people it audits sufficient money so that it can become self-financing? [HON. MEMBERS: "National Audit Office."] I understand that point. Or, it could contract out to the private sector, so that it does not need an increased number of civil servants. The problem is that it is constantly increasing its bureaucracy and costing the taxpayer more.

Sir Peter Hordern: What has happened is that the National Audit Office is employing many more professional people. That does not mean that the overall number of people employed there is increasing. The work of the National Audit Office is certainly increasing—not least because of the number of inquiries from hon. Members—and that is wholly to be welcomed. Hon. Members are much more interested in the activities of the National Audit Office, which explains the small increase in the estimates for the next two years. The House may be interested to know that the report of the commission into the activities of the National Audit Office will be available this week.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Is not money spent on statisticians a good investment? Will the right hon. Gentleman also consider the example of the 1980s, when the Government reduced the number of statisticians, which led to Chancellor Lawson making some disastrous economic decisions from which we are probably still suffering?

Sir Peter Hordern: I do not know that the National Audit Office goes in much for economic decisions. Perhaps it is just as well that it does not. All that I can say is that, the more professional the National Audit Office is, the better it will be for the taxpayer and for the House.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Know-how Fund

35. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the impact of the know-how fund. [36787]

Mr. Hanley: The know-how fund is making a substantial contribution to economic and political reform. There are many examples of its successful impact in the annual report for 1995-96, which was published on 15 July. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer and for emphasising the success of the know-how fund. Does he agree that our improving relations with the emerging democracies of central Europe will be fully strengthened only when those countries become members of the European Union and contribute to that body?

Mr. Hanley: Certainly enlargement is part of our ambition for them.

Mr. Dalyell: What help is being given to deal with the problems of the crumbling sarcophagus at Chernobyl?

Mr. Hanley: I am sorry; could the hon. Gentleman repeat the question? I did not hear it properly.

Mr. Dalyell: What help is being given to deal with the crumbling sarcophagus at Chernobyl, which is creating a real nuclear danger?

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for repeating his question. I do not know the detail about the matter. I shall have to find out from my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), who has responsibility for Ukraine. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and let him have the answer.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Religious Education

39. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, how many clergy on the commission's payroll are currently estimated to undertake the conduct of acts of worship or the teaching of religious education in schools; and if he will make a statement. [36756]

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): This is not a matter for the commissioners. They are not directly responsible in this area, and I am afraid that we do not have access to the relevant statistics, but I understand that the number is considerable.

Mr. Greenway: If a considerable number of clergy already teach in schools, could not more do so? Perhaps the Dean of Lincoln and his associates would be better employed in doing that. Is it not important that the teaching of right and wrong should come first in the Church's priorities and that clergy and bishops should take more of an interest in their schools than they do?

Mr. Alison: I sympathise with what my hon. Friend says, but as he will know, because he is an ex-headmaster, that, for clergy to take part in school assemblies, they have to be invited by the headmaster. If they are likely to be competent and helpful, they will be invited. I am glad to tell my hon. Friend that many dioceses, including Lincoln, run in-service courses as part of their programme of continuing ministerial education so that local clergy are fit to take school assemblies—no mean undertaking, as my hon. Friend knows.

Mr. Spearing: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, whatever the merits of ordained persons conducting services of worship in schools—clearly, denominational schools—that category of person would be regarded by many pupils as having a vested interest? Does he further agree that it is highly desirable that most religious

education be conducted by lay persons? Does he also agree that religion cannot be taught—it is something for consideration by the person concerned?

Mr. Alison: I entirely accept the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. Religious education is not an occasion for proselytisation. The participation of lay contributors to RE is of fundamental importance. Many lay parents of children in schools are drawn into RE and school worship to assist precisely in that way.

Ethical Investment

40. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what policies are followed by the commissioners in respect of ethical investment. [36757]

Mr. Alison: It is the commissioners' policy not to invest in any company of which the main business is in armaments, gambling, breweries and distilleries, tobacco or newspapers. I am arranging for a leaflet setting out our ethical policy to be sent to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Banks: That is very interesting. Does that mean that the 30 per cent. rule still applies, whereby the commissioners are prepared to invest in companies that have only 30 per cent. of their production in arms or some of the other areas that he has just listed? If that is so, does it mean that, provided that we behave ourselves for 70 per cent. of the time, the other 30 per cent. we can have a bit of slap and tickle?

While I have the right hon. Gentleman there, and as I have been such a strong supporter of the Church Commissioners over the years, is there any chance of his making sure that they offer up a few prayers for me for the shadow Cabinet elections? I suspect that I am going to need some divine intervention this year.

Mr. Alison: I think that the rules guiding us on ethical investment would deter us from offering any prayers concerning the shadow Cabinet elections. As for the 30 per cent. figure, the hon. Gentleman is a little wide of the mark. If a company's investment in armaments is as high as 30 per cent., the Church Commissioners are uneasy about investing in it. That is why we are in continual dialogue with GEC about the level of its armaments production.

I ask the hon. Gentleman, before he becomes holier than thou, which I know is not characteristic of him, to remember that many of those companies pay substantial taxation to the Chancellor. He and I should be very careful, when our next salary cheque comes along at the end of July—it will probably be slightly bigger than previously—to ensure that it is ethically acceptable, because some of it may come from those companies about which the Church Commissioners have scruples.

Mr. John Marshall: Why do the Church Commissioners consider that it is immoral to invest in the *Daily Mail*?

Mr. Alison: The rule about not investing in newspapers exists purely so that the Church Commissioners do not take sides in the political involvement or the political sympathies of any newspaper. By dint of not investing in newspapers, we do not invest in *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent* or any others whose politics are different and about whom there might be conflict in Church circles as to the investment made.

Properties and Land

41. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what new proposals he has to increase the revenue from properties and land held by the Church Commissioners. [36758]

Mr. Alison: The commissioners seek to invest in quality properties which will secure a reliable and growing flow of income, attracting commercial and agricultural tenants whose businesses appear sound and likely to prosper.

The commissioners' property portfolio achieved a total return of 19.5 per cent. in 1995, which compared very favourably with industry benchmarks.

Mr. Flynn: I make a similar plea to the one made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), because my case in the shadow Cabinet election is even more deserving.

How much of the £228 million increase in the value of the Church Commissioners' portfolio in agricultural land arose from the fact that they allow blood sports on their land? Why do they allow the pursuit of defenceless animals for fun? Do they believe that Christian charity should be limited to one species only?

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman must have a very high view of the value of foxes and of the number of foxes that there might be on the land, to work out that that could have a significant effect on the property values of our agricultural holdings. We leave it, and have always left it, by tradition, to the personal views of our tenants as to whether they ban hunting or shooting on their land or whether they regard it as acceptable; but all the blood sports must be conducted within the statutory framework of accepted standards for cruelty to animals.

Postal Services

3.32 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): I want to make a statement on the disruption of the postal services nationally as a result of recent and planned future industrial action by employees of the Royal Mail. First, Madam Speaker, I apologise to you and to the House for the fact that news of the Government's intentions was inadvertently disclosed in another place last Thursday.

In the past four weeks there have been three 24-hour national postal strikes, which have caused significant inconvenience and disruption to businesses and to the public throughout the country. In the Government's view, it is unacceptable that the country should be faced with the threat of a series of further strikes in the coming weeks. These strikes are unnecessary and damaging. They harm the industry and the work force, but the real and immediate victims are the customers; and the Government can no longer stand aside.

In the light of the Communication Workers Union announcement on 11 July that the strikes in late June were to be followed by a series of four further strikes, the first of which took place last Thursday, consultations were initiated with the Post Office on 12 July about the implications of a suspension of the statutory monopoly on the delivery of letters for less than £1. I am now consulting the Post Office on a specific proposal to suspend its monopoly for an initial period of one month with effect from 26 July, unless before then the CWU calls off its strike action. If it becomes clear that disruption of the postal services is likely to continue beyond that currently announced, I would propose a further suspension of the monopoly for three months.

The resolution of this dispute is a matter for the Post Office and the union, and I am pleased that they are now talking to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. In these circumstances, it is wholly inappropriate that the planned series of strikes should continue. The Government are concerned to protect the public interest, which is why we now contemplate the suspension of the Post Office's monopoly. If that happens, it will be solely because the union persists with these damaging strikes—strikes which are wrong for consumers, wrong for the economy, and above all wrong for the postal workers themselves. I invite the whole House to condemn the strikes.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Is the Secretary of State aware that most customers will see straight through this piece of transparent dishonesty and will recognise that the Government are trying, yet again, to pursue the folly of Post Office privatisation by any means or on any excuse—despite the fact that it is so unpopular with the public that only 60 out of 16,000 supported the Government's proposals on the last occasion?

The Secretary of State has tried to imply that this action has been forced on him by the announcement of the continuing dispute; but had not the CWU already made public a reduction in its planned action from a 36 to a 24-hour stoppage, and an agreement with the employers to seek conciliation at ACAS, before the Secretary of State made his announcement? He says that he is pleased that the union is now talking to ACAS. Is it not true that it was talking to ACAS before the right hon. Gentleman made his announcement?

Did the Secretary of State rush to make the announcement because he was afraid that the dispute might be settled before he had a chance to use it as an excuse? Is it true that the union and the employer had been with the conciliator for only one hour before the Secretary of State made his intervention?

Does not the pattern of this announcement reveal the right hon. Gentleman's real agenda? He apologised to the House for the inadvertent disclosure of an answer in another place. Will he admit that he told this House that he intended to consult on whether to lift the monopoly; whereas within less than 24 hours, in an answer in another place, he revealed that he was consulting on whether to lift the monopoly on 26 July for one month, with an option on a further period of three months? That made it quite clear that the decision had already been made.

Does not the right hon. Gentleman have a statutory obligation to consult the Post Office; and is not that the only reason why he announced consultation rather than action? Did he in fact consult the Post Office in advance? Is he aware that the Post Office is saying that it is not appropriate for this action to be taken unless there is a continuation of the dispute?

Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that the Post Office is saying that this is not the course of action to take, because lifting its monopoly threatens the universal service at a uniform price, threatens the Royal Mail as we know it, and hence threatens post offices as we know them, with all that that implies for the rural community?

Mr. Lang: I suppose that represents progress of a sort. When I opened my Sunday newspapers I discovered that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) was saying on this matter:

"I have nothing whatsoever to say".

In this, she was at odds with the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), a member of Unison, who called for the Underground strike to go to binding arbitration. His colleague as employment spokesman, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher)—ironically also a member of Unison—contradicted him by saying that there was no question of forcing arbitration on the unions. Meanwhile, the deputy leader of the Labour party was said to be being scraped off the wall. When he denied that, we had to settle for the idea that he was throwing the teacups around. The rest of the shadow Cabinet coyly claimed suddenly to be bound by collective responsibility.

The fact is that we have heard a great sponsored silence on industrial disputes from the Labour party, and the right hon. Lady today has done nothing to change that situation. We listened to hear her condemn the strikes, but not a word of condemnation passed her lips. She referred to transparent dishonesty. I must ask the House: where is the honesty in a party which pretends to be new Labour, with new policies and friends with everyone, yet which fails to condemn strikes that damage the public interest?

The right hon. Lady referred to privatisation, which has nothing to do with this industrial dispute, and she talked about a reduction in support for the strike. The number of workers who are defying their union and going back to work has doubled since the first strike in June.

[Mr. Lang]

I welcome the fact—and I welcomed it last weekend—that the unions and the Post Office are both talking to ACAS. There is no question of a decision already having been made, as the right hon. Lady suggests. I have made it clear in all correspondence and statements that our final decision depends on the conclusion of consultations with the Post Office, which are taking place at present, on the specific proposal of lifting the monopoly for one month from 26 July if the strikes go ahead.

I will consider the Post Office view when I receive it, but it is time that the House came together to condemn strikes in public services of this type. We heard not a word of condemnation from the Labour party—not a word of sympathy or understanding for the disruption to the public interest, to business and to members of the public. Is the Labour party indifferent, or is it in the grip of its trade union bosses? People outside will see the new dangers attaching to new Labour.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Points of order are taken at the end of statements.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the issue at the centre of this dispute is the management's attempt to introduce team working both to improve productivity and to devolve decision-making and responsibility to individual workers? Does not that fact show how luddite the unions still are in their attitude to industrial relations?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. Substantial improvements in productivity could be made in the postal services, and the Post Office is seeking to introduce them. It has made good progress in the negotiations, which is another reason for condemning the movement of the unions to strikes. My hon. Friend is right to identify streaming and team working as the two issues that most concern the negotiations at present.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): Does the Minister recognise that the Post Office and its workers have achieved record productivity and profits already, and that one of the root causes of the strike is the fact that the Government have decided to take away twice the profits that they had been going to take away through the external financing limit? Should not so important an issue as the Post Office monopoly be reviewed in a strategic and long-term way, rather than in this tactical way? Does he think that the private sector will be capable of responding on such a short-term basis when it does not have the infrastructure to do so? Is not the true motive for the Government intervention in a strike, after years of saying that that was not the role of Government, a combination of pique that they were unable to get privatisation through the House and pre-electioneering tactics?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is talking utter nonsense. Last year, profits fell by £50 million. That underlines the fact that the Post Office must continue to build on the improved productivity that has already been achieved and to which I have paid tribute. Substantial further productivity gain is to be had, not least as a result of the KPMG report. The Post Office is right to press for the modernisation of working conditions, and the union is not doing itself or the public any service by abusing the Post Office's monopoly.

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): Will my right hon. Friend comment on the rumours that the difficulties in the negotiations originated in Glasgow and Liverpool, cities not notable for Conservative representation?

Mr. Lang: My right hon. Friend is ahead of me with his information. I have not heard that the difficulties were confined to that, but the union's writ runs across the country and, as I have said, support for the strike among union members has diminished substantially since the first strike.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Does the Secretary of State agree that the rural areas that he and I represent will suffer most by the lifting of the monopoly? How can he face his electorate at the next election when he represents a constituency where the universal provision at a uniform rate is the only way of ensuring an efficient service in our rural areas?

Mr. Lang: No one is contemplating the abandonment of the universal service obligation, but how can the hon. Gentleman face his constituents when he supports a strike that denies the collection or delivery of postal services not just in rural areas such as his, but throughout the country?

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I warmly welcome the Government's action to protect mail users and the ultimate viability of the Post Office. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is typical of the craven cowardice of the Labour party that it refuses to protect mail users by condemning the strike? Does he also agree that it is now time for the Government to consider lifting the monopoly on mail services so that they can compete properly with overseas interests in providing a service for the 21st century?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend raises a broader issue that can be considered only in the long term. It is important to maintain the universal service obligation at a standard price, which is central to the continuing delivery of mail. Those issues would have to be considered against that obligation. In the meantime, it is important that these unnecessary industrial disputes, which have recourse far too easily to strike action, are condemned by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Does the Secretary of State agree that it is an empty gesture to threaten to lift the monopoly? Does he realise the repercussions that that would have, particularly on rural areas? Does he not know that the dispute is almost settled? There is agreement on pay and working conditions, and only a minor amount remains to be agreed. He should not stand there posturing but should sit back and hope that the dispute will be settled. He should not interfere with genuine negotiations that are going on at this moment at ACAS.

Mr. Lang: I hope that the hon. Lady is right and that the dispute is almost over. If that is so, why does she not join me in asking the unions to call off their damaging series of strikes?

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this unnecessary strike, which appears to have much to do with a power struggle within the union, will lead to a loss of business, through the use of faxes, E-mail and other modern technologies, which may never be recovered?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. As I said in my statement, the union is damaging the interests of its own work force. Since the last postal strike, there has been a substantial development of E-mail, fax machines and other means of communication. Every time that there is a serious dispute in the postal service, the Post Office loses substantial business, some of which never returns.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the President of the Board of Trade answer the factual point put by my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett)? Is it true that the unions had been at ACAS for only an hour when he made the announcement from the Front Bench?

Mr. Lang: I understand that the first ACAS involvement was on 17 July—last Wednesday—and the second was last Friday. The unions and the Post Office are speaking separately to ACAS this afternoon.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): In making this welcome statement, is not my right hon. Friend being a little unfair on the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett)? How can she be expected to take the side of business and the people of this country when later this week she will need the votes of all the trade union-paid poodles to elect her back to the shadow Cabinet?

Mr. Lang: That may be why the Labour party is being so coy about this matter. But the public have a right to know the Opposition's policy on industrial relations. If the spectre of the car park meeting, secondary picketing, secondary strikes, flying pickets and closed shops is to be resurrected, the electorate should know about it, and the sooner the better.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does the Secretary of State recognise that his statement will be regarded, and rightly so, as an act of sheer spite against the unions? He clearly took every opportunity to put the employer's side. Some Conservatives—the Secretary of State may be one—would like to see strikes in the public sector banned. Is it not a fundamental right in a democracy to tell one's employer that one does not want to go into work and that one has a right to strike? That is the point that we used to make against dictatorships. What about that right in Britain?

Mr. Lang: I am not taking the employer's point of view. I am not taking a side in this dispute. I am simply taking the side of the public interest, and it is time that those who operate a monopoly service recognised that they must take seriously their obligation to the public.

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his proposed suspension of the postal monopoly will be a welcome relief to the businesses that rely on the postal service to keep them in business—that is, for the receipt of orders and the execution of orders? His swift action to bring the matter to a head will be welcomed.

Mr. Lang: No one would pretend that the suspension of the monopoly will ensure that the service will continue in the way that the Post Office has operated it—this will be a second-best solution. However, if it enables at least some mail to get through, it will be better than nothing at all.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Secretary of State appreciate that this is a dispute, leading to a strike, in which the members of the union have a powerful case? Is he aware that they are trying to get rid of Saturday working? The Secretary of State, as a Member of Parliament, has voted in the House for Members to have a four-day week, to have Friday off, for 10 weeks a year. In this day and age, surely the people who deliver the mail have the right to a five-day week. I believe that they have a powerful case. Will the Secretary of State bear in mind the fact that a ballot was decided by Conservative Members of Parliament in debates in the House? It is a moderate union, putting a moderate case. We are beginning to see the real face of the Tory Government—Hitler and Mussolini banned strikes, which is what the Government would like to do.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman has got his facts wrong. The strike is not about Saturday working—it is about team working as an improved mechanism for sorting mail in the post offices, and about how much first-class mail should be delivered in the first delivery and how much should be delivered in the second delivery. These issues could easily be resolved by negotiation and good will on both sides, without the need to damage the public interest.

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many people in this country will regret the decision of the Post Office workers to take industrial action? Does he agree that today's decision may turn out to be an historic one? Perhaps it is time that this country addressed the question whether essential workers in the Post Office, on the tubes and in other areas should have the right to strike, or whether it might be better to replace this outmoded and outdated weapon by a negotiating board and arbitration.

Mr. Lang: I hear what my hon. Friend is saying, and he has expressed a point of view that is held in some quarters. The armed services, the police, prison officers and merchant seamen when at sea are not permitted to strike. These are issues where there are difficulties of definition, of enforcement and of the international law and our obligations under the International Labour Organisation. I have noted what my hon. Friend said, and I have no doubt that the debate will continue.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): The Secretary of State will be aware that the Government effectively own the Post Office and get about £400

[Mr. Tony Banks]

million profit from its activities. Which other company, when faced with a dispute in its own organisation, would seek to destroy the organisation? That is precisely what the lifting of this monopoly is all about.

Post Office workers are not the best paid workers in the world. We owe them more than perhaps any other group of workers for the services that they give us as Members of Parliament. We should be supporting them. They will see the lifting of the monopoly as nothing more than stinking blackmail from a stinking Government.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman underlines the fact that the Post Office and the union have an interest in avoiding having the monopoly lifted, which can easily be achieved by the union calling off its industrial disputes—they will be far more damaging to the Post Office and to its staff in the longer term.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): How long does my right hon. Friend think it will take for another U-turn to be performed by the Leader of the Opposition in opposing this strike and splattering his deputy back on that wall?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend tempts me to stray into the private grief of the Labour party. I know that there are shadow Cabinet elections this week. I suspect that union sponsorship affects most of the Labour Members' attitudes in these matters.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): As the Secretary of State has intervened in this industrial dispute, will he tell us whether it is now the attitude of Her Majesty's Government that, where workers have a ballot to decide their industrial action, they should be overridden by the particular interests of the Conservative party?

Mr. Lang: The fact that the trade union had a ballot to embark on this series of industrial disputes—a ballot that happened as a result of legislation introduced by this Conservative Government, which has caused industrial relations to improve beyond recognition—does not prevent the union from calling off the strike now. It is to protect the public interest that we are urging the union to call off the strike.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the real threat to the future of the Royal Mail comes from these strikes, which are costing the Royal Mail millions of pounds and threatening jobs—not merely among people employed by the postal service, but among those in companies that rely on a regular and punctual mail service for the future of their business?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the reasons why this country's economic performance has improved so dramatically in recent years is the dramatic improvement in our industrial relations. Eternal vigilance is required by us to ensure that the improved industrial relations record that we have achieved is not forfeited, and that it does not fall prey to the Labour party.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): Is not this about dividing up the Post Office, undermining it and reaching a situation in which privatisation is achieved in the end? Once the Government get their teeth into something they never let it go, despite the strength of public opinion. Everyone should be aware of that, and ensure that we do not accept privatisation.

Mr. Lang: This dispute is not about privatisation, but about the abuse of a public monopoly. Where there is a monopoly there are obligations. The union should be more aware of its obligations to the public interest before calling these damaging strikes.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North–East): The President of the Board of Trade is to be congratulated on his actions so far, but will he now meet industry representatives to consider a permanent reduction in the monopoly—from £1 to 30p, for example? That would certainly help companies, such as Document Interlink in my constituency, to provide a first-class service for urgent business mail.

Mr. Lang: That is an issue for consideration at a later date. I think that my hon. Friend would agree with me that the current priority is to ensure that this damaging series of strikes is called off. I have made provision for the lifting of the monopoly not to come into force if the forthcoming series of strikes is cancelled, and for the lifting to last for only one month if the series of strikes is not followed by further strikes. If there is a threat by the union of further strikes, however, I shall announce that we are considering extending the suspension for a further three months. I hope that that will not be necessary.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry deny that there have been substantial increases in productivity in the Post Office in recent years, and that the matter that is in dispute is a relatively small one, which is now before ACAS? As for the public interest, will not the whole nature of the historic Royal Mail be changed if the monopoly is taken away? How will the public be assured that the Government are taking away the monopoly in the public interest and not in the interests of a few people who run high-speed, limited mail services, and who may recently have had a dinner with the Prime Minister?

Mr. Lang: My statement today is not about the removal of the monopoly in the long term but about the suspension of the monopoly as a means of ensuring that the public interest is protected. If the dispute is as close to resolution as the hon. Gentleman suggests, clearly he should be pressing the union to call off the strikes so that the matter can be peacefully resolved.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): When my right hon. Friend hears about threats to rural post offices, will he remember that similar fears were expressed when British Telecom was privatised? Those fears were groundless, as are these fears about the future of rural post offices. Will he also comment on the fact that the Communication Workers Union contributes £200,000 to the Labour party?

Mr. Lang: I hear what my hon. Friend says in the first part of his question. As for the second part of his question, that fact speaks for itself.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that none of the business men who have recently paid £100,000 to be members of the Prime Minister's Premier Club will profit from the decision that the right hon. Gentleman has made today?

Mr. Lang: The people who will profit from today's decision—if it brings closer a resolution to this dispute—will be the public.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): What contingency plans does the Secretary of State have if, as a result of his interference, the dispute is racked up to a higher level and the Post Office decides to lock out some or all of its employees?

Mr. Lang: I wish that the Labour party, and the hon. Gentleman in particular, would be more positive and constructive in their approach to the dispute. We should be talking about resolving the dispute. Labour Members have the capacity to bring pressure to bear on their trade union masters to abandon the strikes, so that the dispute can be resolved.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North) *rose—*

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): He has just walked in.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has not just walked in. He has been in his place—I saw him.

Dr. Reid: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As usual, the Under-Secretary of State has got his facts wrong.

I much regret the inconvenience caused to the public, but if there is one thing that they dislike more than inconvenience, it is corruption. If the Secretary of State gets rid of the monopoly, will he give the public a guarantee that no company whose members have paid large amounts of money to dine with the right hon. Gentleman or the Prime Minister will benefit from the lifting of the monopoly? Will the right hon. Gentleman answer yes or no?

Mr. Lang: The people who will benefit in the short term will be the companies that secure additional business by becoming involved in carrying the mail from which the monopoly has been suspended. The best way in which the hon. Gentleman can deal with his concern is to ensure that the strikes are abandoned. The monopoly would then stay in place.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): As the Secretary of State has failed to answer this question twice, I will repeat it slowly. Can the right hon. Gentleman give a categorical guarantee that no one who is currently paying large sums of money to the Tory party, via the Premier Club or any other means, will benefit from the industrial dispute?

Mr. Lang: I give the hon. Gentleman the same answer that I gave the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller). I wish that Labour Members who have benefited from trade union sponsorship and financial support would put aside their commitment to their trade union masters and act for once in the public interest.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am not too sensitive a soul, but is not there a convention that Ministers make statements by leave of the House? That implies some kind of condition—that the statement will be about a particular matter. When the President of the Board of Trade answered my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) we heard a load of pre-packaged abuse that bore no relevance to the legitimate questions that she asked. Do you, have no power to cut short statements that are not about the subject to which they purport to relate?

Madam Speaker: Ministers do not require the leave of the House or my authority to make a statement—they have every right. The words "With the leave of the House" are simply a turn of phrase, and it is quite incorrect for a Minister to use them. Ministers can make statements in the House whenever they wish.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. I have hardly finished. I was asked whether I can cut short a statement if I felt that it was not dealing with the subject in question. The straightforward answer is no. I do not know with which matters a statement deals until the Minister rises in his place to make it.

Mr. Spearing: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. We fully understand everything that you have said to this point, but surely it is within your power to cut short any right hon. or hon. Member—whether or not he is a Minister—who fails to answer a question but introduces new material that is abusive and irrelevant? Will you consider that particular power—which I believe you have?

Madam Speaker: I sit in the Chair hour after hour, and I hear Front Benchers and Back Benchers in all parts of the House introduce material that is not relevant. If I were to interfere every time that happened, I would be interfering every three or four minutes. I take the hon. Gentleman's point seriously—but the House would hear much more from me if I were to take it to its logical conclusion. I said not too long ago that there have been numerous occasions recently when hon. Members have not dealt with the matter in question, be it a statement or question. Ministers and Back Benchers are drifting too far away from the point, and I will do my utmost to bring them all back to the subject on the Order Paper. I believe that the House requires that of me.

Points of Order

4.3 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Last week, the deputy leader of the Labour party visited Harrow. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and I are keen that he should visit Harrow as often as possible because it is good for our votes. However, the courtesy of the House is for hon. Members who are visiting the constituencies of other hon. Members to let them know. Not only did the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) not let us know that he was visiting our constituencies, but when my hon. Friend reminded him of the usual courtesy, he used my hon. Friend's letter to ridicule the suggestion that people should abide by such courtesies.

Could you give us your advice, Madam Speaker, on how we might protect ourselves from such an abuse of the courtesies of the House? Perhaps the deputy leader of the Labour party regards himself as too important to abide by such courtesies.

Madam Speaker: This matter is raised with me several times a week. Quite frankly, it is very juvenile to raise such a point of order on the Floor of the House. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman could deal perfectly adequately with the deputy leader of the Labour party and not use the time of the House, on a very busy day, to raise such an issue.

Ms Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Has there been a request from the Secretary of State for Social Security to make an oral statement about his decision to privatise, against the wishes of the civil servants involved, the child benefit centre in Washington? Surely such an important issue should not be left simply to a written answer.

Madam Speaker: No Government Department has told me that it is seeking to make such a statement. As I explained earlier, I have no control over statements and I cannot demand them from a Minister. I have not been advised that the Secretary of State is seeking to make a statement, at least today, on that issue.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is item 2 on the Order Paper, the Adjournment (Summer) motion, debatable?

Madam Speaker: No, it is not debatable.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Overnight, there was a break-in at Clyde submarine base, which houses Trident submarines, by seemingly amateur intruders. Had they been armed terrorists, the consequences would be too horrible to imagine. Given that there was a similar break-in seven years ago, when the then Prime Minister ordered a board of inquiry investigation, has the Secretary of State for Defence taken this regrettable incident equally seriously and ensured that a statement will be made to the House?

Madam Speaker: I have not been informed that a statement is to be made on that incident. However, before the House goes into recess, there will be opportunities for the hon. Gentleman to raise the issue if he so wishes.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will have heard many references—and no doubt seen reports in the press over the weekend—to the Premier Club, where business people apparently spend large sums of money wining and dining with Ministers. As it is alleged that some people pay up to £100,000 for dinner with the Prime Minister—which clearly cannot be for either the food or the company—do you think you should ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate to ensure that the facilities of this House are not being used for what are clearly party political purposes: to raise money for the Conservative party and to buy influence in Government decisions?

Madam Speaker: I do not have to ask the Serjeant at Arms; I know what the facilities of the House are used for, and it is not for any such fund-raising activities.

CONSOLIDATED FUND BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

ADJOURNMENT (SUMMER)

Ordered,

That this House, at its rising on Wednesday 24 July, do adjourn until Monday 14th October.—[*Mr. Wells.*]

Housing Bill

Lords amendments considered.

4.9 pm

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware of the huge volume of amendments with which the House is being asked to deal this afternoon—no fewer than 329. Some are minor and technical, but many are not. There are 31 new clauses and three new schedules; one of the new schedules is 21 pages long. The bundle of Lords amendments covers 85 printed pages, considerably more than most of the Bills that have been presented during this Session.

Is it not an abuse of parliamentary procedure for such an enormous volume of lengthy and substantial new legislation to be presented at this late stage in the proceedings, when there is no opportunity for detailed scrutiny? Does that not bring into disrepute our procedures, which are supposed to ensure that legislation is properly scrutinised? Does it not make it far more likely that—either during the next Session, or during the one after that—we shall have to deal with amendments tabled to remedy defects in legislation that has been drafted hastily, and has not been subject to proper scrutiny?

May I ask you to give the matter some thought and to advise us—not necessarily this afternoon—whether steps can be taken to ensure that, in future, the House is not asked to consider such an impossibly large volume of amendments so late in the process, when there is not adequate time for full and adequate scrutiny of the legislation?

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. The number of amendments demonstrates the opposite of what the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) suggested. In Committee, when a point was raised that I thought worthy of reflection, I said that I would take it away and look at it. That happened throughout our deliberations. We have shown that the procedures work, if hon. Members on both sides of a Committee want to secure the best possible form of legislation. Most of these measures are technical, and reflect the openness with which we debated the Bill.

Madam Speaker: I have noted the points raised by the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford). As he is fully aware, it is the Government who arrange the business of the House—the Minister has just explained that—and the Government will have noted what the hon. Gentleman had to say. Let me say for my part that I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is so familiar with the Bill that he is quite capable of coping with the business before us.

Clause 1

THE REGISTER OF SOCIAL LANDLORDS

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 1, line 13, leave out ("Part") and insert ("section").

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendments Nos. 2, 17, 23, 24 and 26.

Mr. Curry: These are technical amendments, which enable the register to be introduced in an orderly manner on a phased basis.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 2 agreed to.

Clause 2

ELIGIBILITY FOR REGISTRATION

Lords amendment: No. 3, in page 1, line 17, at end insert ("which is a housing association").

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendments Nos. 4 to 9.

Mr. Curry: Again, this is a tidying-up amendment.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 4 to 9 agreed to.

Clause 8

POWER OF REGISTERED SOCIAL LANDLORD TO DISPOSE OF LAND

Lords amendment: No. 10, in page 5, line 24, leave out subsection (3).

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendments Nos. 11, 12, 27, 28 and 34.

Mr. Curry: The purpose of the amendments is to clarify when the Housing Corporation's consent is required by a registered social landlord seeking to dispose of land. Some of them also clarify when the corporation can serve a notice to obtain information, and one would add to the list of topics on which the corporation may issue housing management guidance.

Mr. Raynsford: The Opposition welcome the amendments, especially Lords amendment No. 34, which increases the number of subjects on which the Housing Corporation may issue guidance. That particularly highlights the issue of devolution to tenants of decisions concerning the management of housing accommodation.

I put it to the Minister, however, that there is an inherent conflict between this provision—which we welcome—and the extremely restrictive guidance that the Housing Corporation has been issuing on its ability to register as social landlords organisations containing a majority of tenants on the board, or in which the tenants have the major interest in the new social landlord. If the advice that is to be issued by the Housing Corporation is

[Mr. Raynsford]

to be meaningful and not ridiculous, it will be necessary for it to reconsider that blanket restriction on its ability to register social landlords with the majority of tenant representatives.

I understand from the Housing Corporation that the decision was not taken by it uniquely or on its own initiative, but that there is a presumption on the part of the Government that such bodies should not be registered. Government action will therefore be necessary in order to avoid the Housing Corporation being put in a ridiculous position.

Despite the Minister's comments about the reason for the large number of amendments with which we are dealing today, the consequence of the way in which matters have been handled is that an enormous volume of material is being considered at the very latest of stages in the Bill's progress through Parliament, and, sadly, many loose ends of this nature will not be sorted out properly in the time available.

4.15 pm

Mr. Curry: There is one area in which we have made it clear that we do not expect there to be majorities for any of the constituent parties—the new housing companies. I am willing to discuss with the Housing Corporation any other matter that concerns the guidance it issues, in the context not only of its guidance but of guidance that will necessarily follow this legislation.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 11 and 12 agreed to.

Clause 12

PRIORITY OF CHARGE FOR REPAYMENT OF DISCOUNT

Lords amendment: No. 13, in page 7, line 24, leave out ("in writing")

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendments Nos. 14, 30, 32, 38, 41, 74 to 81, 243 and 271.

Mr. Curry: This group is technical down to its fingertips.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 14 agreed to.

Clause 15

RELEVANT AND EXEMPTED DISPOSALS

Lords amendment: No. 15, in page 10, line 3, leave out from third ("of") to end of line 8 and insert

("any such order as is mentioned in subsection (5A);")

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendments Nos. 16, 138 to 140, 167, 168, 242 and 315.

Mr. Curry: This group is technical. It reconciles the Bill to other housing legislation and other housing legislation to legislation that deals with matrimonial breakdown. I commend it to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 16 and 17 agreed to.

Clause 17

RIGHT OF TENANT TO ACQUIRE DWELLING: SUPPLEMENTARY PROVISIONS

Lords amendment: No. 18, in page 12, line 5, at end insert—

("( ) Before making an order which would have the effect that an area ceased to be designated under subsection (1)(b), the Secretary of State shall consult—

(a) the local housing authority or authorities in whose district the area or any part of it is situated or, if the order is general in its effect, local housing authorities in general, and

(b) such bodies appearing to him to be representative of registered social landlords as he considers appropriate.")

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Some concern was expressed about the possible removal of the exemption from the purchase grant in rural areas for housing association tenants. The fear was that the Secretary of State might act arbitrarily. We have therefore tabled this amendment so that the Secretary of State must consult before there is any removal from the list of settlements that are designated not to have the right to buy. I commend it to the House.

Mr. Raynsford: The Opposition welcome the amendment for the reasons that the Minister has made clear. It ensures that the Secretary of State will have to consult the relevant local housing authority or authorities before reaching a decision. It also requires the Secretary of State to consult bodies that appear to him to be representative of registered social landlords.

I would welcome some guidance from the Minister on what will be the Housing Corporation's broad approach to deciding which organisations are representative of registered social landlords. I assume that the Secretary of State will be seeking guidance from the Housing Corporation on the matter.

Will every social landlord operating in this area be consulted, or will only a relatively small number be consulted? If the latter, what will be the criteria for deciding which ones are appropriate? In some areas, many social landlords operate, and it might prove completely impractical to consult all of them. On the other hand, if the Secretary of State were arbitrary in his choice of consultees, an entirely fair point of view might not be registered by social landlords in the area. It would be helpful to have an indication as to how this discretion is likely to be exercised.

Mrs. Diana Maddock (Christchurch): I and my colleagues welcome the amendment also, although I am sorry that it does not go as far as the amendments that I tabled in Committee. But the amendment recognises the importance of the view of local authorities in dealing with the provision of social housing. I look forward to the Minister saying who else he will consult, because, as the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) said, it

could be a number of people in some areas, and we need guidance on that. In general, however, I welcome the amendment.

Mr. Curry: This is a question of common sense. I envisage that the Housing Corporation will wish to consult what will become the National Housing Federation, and it will consult the landlords operating in a particular area. Settlements of 3,000 do not have hundreds of housing associations, nor do rural areas, and a handful will specialise in this field. I do not envisage practical difficulties, and it is our intention to consult fully.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 24

THE DISPOSAL PROCEEDS FUND

Lords amendment: No. 19, in page 15, line 39, leave out from ("section") to ("do") in line 40 and insert

("27 below (recovery, &c. of social housing grants) and section 52 of the Housing Act 1988 (recovery, &c. of grants under that Act and earlier enactments)")

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendments Nos. 20 to 22 and 25.

Mr. Curry: These amendments are absolutely technical, and I commend them to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments No. 20 to 28 agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Clause 31

ENFORCEMENT OF NOTICE TO PROVIDE INFORMATION, &C.

Lords amendment: No. 29, in page 19, line 16, at end insert—

("( ) Proceedings for an offence under subsection (1) or (2) may be brought only by or with the consent of the Corporation or the Director of Public Prosecutions.")

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendments Nos. 31, 33, 35, 36, 269 and 270.

Mr. Curry: These amendments deal with proceedings for offences committed by social landlords, and provide that proceedings for such offences can be initiated only with the consent of the Housing Corporation or the Director of Public Prosecutions. Their purpose is to protect social landlords from vexatious prosecutions, and they are consistent with other legislation covering the matter.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 30 to 36 agreed to.

Clause 39

INSOLVENCY, &C. OF REGISTERED SOCIAL LANDLORD: SCHEME OF PROVISIONS

Lords amendment: No. 37, in page 23, line 13, leave out ("(section 47)") and insert

("(sections 47 and (*Powers of the manager: transfer of engagements*))")

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendments Nos. 40, 47, 50, 57, 58, 61 to 64, 66 to 69 and 71.

Mr. Curry: These are minor amendments to improve the way in which the clause works. There is no issue of policy or principle involved, and I commend them to the House.

Mr. Raynsford: I want to draw attention to Lords amendment No. 71, which makes provision for the manager appointed by the Housing Corporation in such cases to arrange a transfer of engagements where a housing association is in financial difficulty. The transfer ensures that the properties can continue to be managed without the risk of the tenants being forced to leave their homes.

We especially welcome that provision, because, earlier this year, the Government tabled a series of measures in the Housing Bill, which were subsequently withdrawn, that would have put at risk a significant number of tenants whose homes were owned by housing associations that got into difficulty. By applying the Insolvency Act 1986, the Government would have made it much more difficult to use procedures such as those now proposed. A transfer of engagements ensures continuity of management and, more importantly—from the lender's point of view—continuity of income stream.

Everyone involved with the housing world knows how important it is to ensure that confidence is maintained among lenders, but, equally, how vital it is to ensure that tenants are not put at risk by difficulties that may from time to time confront their housing associations. We welcome Lords amendment No. 71, but regret that the Government have gone a tortuous way to get to it. However, we are moving towards a more satisfactory framework, which should ensure that proper arrangements are in place to deal with housing associations that get into financial difficulty, without putting tenants at risk of losing their homes.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 38 agreed to.

Clause 40

INITIAL NOTICE TO BE GIVEN TO THE CORPORATION

Lords amendment: No. 39, in page 24, line 10, leave out ("charitable trust") and insert

("registered charity (other than a company registered under the Companies Act 1985)")

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendments Nos. 42 to 46, 48, 49, 51, 54, 56, 59 and 65.

Mr. Curry: These are purely drafting amendments, which I commend to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 40 to 51 agreed to.

Clause 43

PERIOD OF MORATORIUM

Lords amendment: No. 52, in page 25, line 35, leave out subsection (1) and insert—

("(1) The moratorium in consequence of the taking of any step as mentioned in section 41—

(a) begins when the step is taken, and

(b) ends at the end of the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which notice of its having been taken was given to the Corporation under that section,

subject to the following provisions.")

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendments Nos. 53, 55, 60, 70, 72 and 73.

Mr. Curry: We had a considerable debate in Committee about what would happen in the event of a new social landlord becoming bankrupt or getting into financial difficulty. We provided that the Housing Corporation would be able to step in for a cooling-off period to protect the interests of all the parties—the tenants as much as the lenders. A small problem, rather than a significant one, could arise that could be sorted out shortly after the introduction of the so-called cooling off period.

The amendments allow the Housing Corporation to suspend a moratorium when the problem that provoked it has been solved, and it no longer needs to make a proposal. The Housing Corporation must consult the lender before calling it off, but this is a common-sense amendment, which I commend to the House.

Mr. Raynsford: I shall discuss Lords amendments Nos. 60, 70 and 73. We greatly welcome Lords amendment No. 60, which gives effect to a point that we pressed in Committee. It will ensure that members of the committee of a housing association are not required by the duties imposed by the Bill to act in a way contrary to their fiduciary or other duties towards the proper running and management of their association.

Lords amendment No. 70 is equally welcome. It specifies that the manager appointed by the Housing Corporation in such cases

"shall, so far as practicable, consult the landlord's tenants about any exercise of his powers which is likely to affect them and inform them about any such exercise of his powers."

The Minister will have anticipated my question. Might not the words "so far as practicable" provide an opportunity for some managers to disregard the obligation, which I believe Parliament wishes them to honour, to ensure that tenants are properly consulted?

I hope that that will not be the case, but sadly one knows of instances in which such words have been used as loopholes. While I understand that the Government do not want to require an absolutely binding obligation, which the manager might not be able to honour in all circumstances, there is a risk that the provision might be used to short-circuit the proper consultation processes with tenants—perhaps if a considerable amount of money is at stake or the lender puts on a lot of pressure to try to resolve the problem quickly and get new arrangements into place without delay. I hope that the Minister can give an assurance on that point.

4.30 pm

Amendment No. 73 involves the deletion of subsection 49(3), which simply states:

"Except as provided by this section, the actions of a manager appointed under section 46 shall not be questioned by any legal proceedings whatever."

The removal of that subsection raises a question whether the manager might be frustrated in his actions if he were threatened with legal action by one of the parties—possibly an unsecured creditor, unhappy with the approach being taken by the manager, who will be predominantly interested in the point of view of the secured creditors and the lenders in particular.

The threat of legal action could cut across or interfere with a manager's ability to exercise his powers, which could be damaging. I would welcome some explanation from the Minister of why the amendment appears to delete that proposed immunity.

Mr. Curry: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I must draw amendment No. 55 to the hon. Gentleman's attention. That requires:

"So far as practicable no proposals shall be made"

that would leave

"unsecured creditors"

worse off than they would otherwise have been. Amendment No. 60 makes it clear that the duty of members, directors and trustees to co-operate with the implementation of the proposal does not require them to act in a manner contrary to their fiduciary obligations.

The reference to "so far as practicable" in amendment No. 70 is intended to be directed towards taking the action, rather than giving a loophole to enable people not to take it. So the amendment has to be taken at its face value. We would not have proposed it, had we intended it merely to be platonic in its effect. It is intended to make managers have the firm intention of consulting, unless there is a clear reason why that cannot be done.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 53 to 81 agreed to.

Clause 64

MAKING AND APPROVAL OF REGISTRATION SCHEMES

Lords amendment: No. 82, in page 36, line 51, at end insert

("and to renew the registration as and when required by the scheme.")

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendments Nos. 83 to 91.

Mr. Clappison: The purpose of this group of amendments is to improve the working of local authority registration schemes for houses in multiple occupation. They deal principally with the content of schemes, publicity, and appeals against local authority decisions on applications for registration.

Mr. Raynsford: We welcome the amendments so far as they go. There is no question but that more effective powers are needed to deal with the problems of houses in multiple occupation. It is well known that multi-occupied houses contain not merely the worst conditions of any category of housing, but also the greatest risks to life from both fire and carbon monoxide poisoning. There is widespread agreement that action is long overdue to ensure that the worst conditions are tackled more effectively. We differ from the Government on the best way to do so.

There is an overwhelming case for a national mandatory licensing scheme to cover all areas and all multi-occupied houses, concentrating in the first instance on those in which there is the greatest risk on a proper risk assessment basis. The Government have proposed a more limited registration scheme instead, which will be discretionary, and so will not apply if a local authority chooses not to operate the scheme in its area, and will apply only to a more limited category of multi-occupied houses.

We have serious reservations about the likely effectiveness and scope of the Government's scheme. Nevertheless, a scheme is better than nothing, even if it is a limited scheme, so we welcome the amendments made by the other place, which give effect to some of the measures that we advocated in Committee.

In particular, we welcome amendment No. 88, which inserts as a ground for refusal of registration reference to the person managing or having control of the property not being a fit and proper person.

We also welcome the arrangements under clause 91 for keeping copies of the registration scheme and making them available to people on request on reasonable terms. Those are important provisions to ensure that people who are not fit and proper persons can be denied registration, and that people involved—I think in particular of the residents living in multi-occupied houses, who have a particular interest in the matter—can seek information from the local authority about how the scheme is framed and how it operates.

I put it to the Minister that, if there was a national mandatory scheme, life would be much easier, because there would not be the likelihood of variations from area to area in the way in which the scheme operated. The tenant would be able to contact the Department of the Environment, which could issue a national advice leaflet providing information applicable in all areas. That is something which we shall wait for the next Government to introduce, but in the meantime we welcome the steps that have been taken to improve the registration arrangements.

Mrs. Maddock: I and my hon. Friends welcome the amendments. Like the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), I am disappointed that there will not be a mandatory scheme. I particularly welcome the fact that it will be easier for councils which have a registration scheme to get works done. That has always been a problem in the past. We discussed the matter at length in Committee, and I hope that what the Government propose will work.

In common with many people outside the House, we would like a mandatory scheme. The local authorities asked for a mandatory scheme. Despite the improvements in the amendments, the scheme will not be mandatory, and that is the real weakness of this part of the Bill. However, the amendments are an improvement on the position that we were left with in Committee, and I welcome them.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 83 to 91 agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 92, after clause 72, to insert the following new clause—*Section 354 direction to be local land charge—*

". In section 354 of the Housing Act 1985 (power to limit number of occupants of house), at the end insert—

"(8) A direction under this section is a local land charge."."

Mr. Clappison: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 94, 95 and 320.

Mr. Clappison: This is a group of miscellaneous amendments relating to houses in multiple occupation. Amendment No. 95 allows local housing authorities eight weeks instead of four to decide whether to make a compulsory purchase order which defers the obligation to prepare and serve a management scheme for a house in multiple occupation, subject to a control order.

Lords amendment agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 93, after clause 73, to insert the following new clause—*Works notices: improvement of enforcement procedures—*

". After section 377 of the Housing Act 1985 insert—

"Works notices: improvement of enforcement procedures

377A.—(1) The Secretary of State may by order provide that a local housing authority shall act as specified in the order before serving a works notice.

In this section a "works notice" means a notice under section 352 or 372 (notices requiring the execution of works).

(2) An order under this section may provide that the authority—

(a) shall as soon as practicable give to the person on whom the works notice is to be served a written notice which satisfies the requirements of subsection (3); and

(b) shall not serve the works notice until after the end of such period beginning with the giving of a notice which satisfies the requirements of subsection (3) as may be determined by or under the order.

(3) A notice satisfies the requirements of this subsection if it—

(a) states the works which in the authority's opinion should be undertaken, and explains why and within what period;

(b) explains the grounds on which it appears to the authority that the works notice might be served;

(c) states the type of works notice which is to be served, the consequences of serving it and whether there is a right to make representations before, or a right of appeal against, the serving of it.

(4) An order under this section may also provide that, before the authority serves the works notice on any person, they—

(a) shall give to that person a written notice stating—

(i) that they are considering serving the works notice and the reasons why they are considering serving the notice; and

(ii) that the person may, within a period specified in the written notice, make written representations to them or, if the person so requests, make oral representations to them in the presence of a person determined by or under the order; and

(b) shall consider any representations which are duly made and not withdrawn.

(5) An order under this section may in particular—

(a) make provision as to the consequences of any failure to comply with a provision made by the order;

(b) contain such consequential, incidental, supplementary or transitional provisions and savings as the Secretary of State considers appropriate (including provisions modifying enactments relating to the periods within which proceedings must be brought).

(6) An order under this section—

(a) may make different provision with respect to different cases or descriptions of case (including different provision for different areas), and

(b) shall be made by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.

(7) Nothing in any order under this section shall—

(a) preclude a local housing authority from serving a works notice on any person, or from requiring any person to take immediate remedial action to avoid a works notice being served on him, in any case where it appears to them to be necessary to serve such a notice or impose such a requirement; or

(b) require such an authority to disclose any information the disclosure of which would be contrary to the public interest."."

Mr. Clappison: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment embodies the principles of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 in relation to the provisions of the Bill.

Mr. Raynsford: This amendment raises a much more problematic issue—the speed with which a local authority will be able to act enforce improvements in properties that are unsatisfactory.

As the Minister said, the amendment draws on procedures in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. The Minister will be well aware that precisely this ethos of deregulation, with which the Government are at times obsessed, is a serious problem in relation to multi-occupied houses, where there is a clear need for regulation.

The risk to human life created by the poor conditions, the threats and the hazards that exist in so many multi-occupied houses makes regulation essential. The Government have had to accept the need for a registration scheme for some multi-occupied houses.

The risk is that, because of their obsession with deregulation, the Government are putting in place a procedure that will make it slow and cumbersome for local authorities to operate, and so delay the process of improving substandard properties that urgently need improvements.

The concept behind the new clause that is incorporated in the Bill by Lords amendment No. 93 is that there should be a procedure for serving preliminary informal notices on the landlord before the local authority moves to impose its actual works notices, setting out what is required to be done. In principle, one has no disagreement with giving an informal notice to a landlord at the earliest possible stage, and only then following up with a works notice if the landlord clearly does not intend to act on it, but putting that in the Bill provides an opportunity, which I fear will be exploited by some bad landlords, to frustrate the process by seeking to challenge a local authority that acts reasonably expeditiously because it knows that there is a serious—possibly life-threatening—problem in that property.

The rogue landlord, advised by clever lawyers who may be less scrupulous than some, might well use the provisions of subsection (4) of the new section 377A, which is being incorporated into the Housing Act 1985 by Lords amendment No. 93, to challenge the validity of action taken by a local authority seeking to serve a notice.

If that were the case, and the authority were prevented from taking expeditious action because of the need to go through all the legal procedures, which can often be long drawn out and tortuous, and if in the meantime there were to be a tragedy and a person were to be killed because of a fire or die from carbon monoxide poisoning, that would be an unacceptable and unnecessary situation, brought about by the potential for delay.

We do not object to the principle, as good practice, of serving an informal notice quickly, but there must be no risk of the actual enforcement action being delayed by the opportunity that may be presented to the unscrupulous or disreputable to try to drag out the proceedings and so delay proper enforcement action.

Mr. Clappison: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I draw the attention of the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) to the way in which subsection 93(7) overrides subsection 93(4) and deals with the point that he has just made?

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 94 and 95 agreed to.

Clause 78

RESTRICTION ON TERMINATION OF TENANCY FOR FAILURE TO PAY SERVICE CHARGE.

Lords amendment: No. 96, in page 50, line 37, at end insert—

("( ) The reference in subsection (1) to premises let as a dwelling does not include premises let on—

(a) a tenancy to which Part II of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 applies (business tenancies),

(b) a tenancy of an agricultural holding within the meaning of the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986 in relation to which that Act applies, or

(c) a farm business tenancy within the meaning of the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995.")

Mr. Clappison: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendments Nos. 97, 98, 247 and 322.

Mr. Clappison: The purpose behind this group of amendments is to change the application of clause 78, which prevents actions for forfeiture of a lease for non-payment of service charges until the amount has been agreed or determined. That removes one of the weapons that has been used by some landlords whose standards have fallen short. Lords amendment No. 98 has been introduced to provide that, if a section 146 notice requiring the tenant to pay the service charge is served by the landlord, it must clearly set out the effect of these new restrictions, and that warning must be given in conspicuous characters.

Mr. Raynsford: As the Minister said, this is an important measure relating to problems facing leaseholders who are threatened, or have been threatened in the past, by the prospect of forfeiting their lease because of a dispute about, for example, service charges.

We very much welcome the steps that have been taken under pressure. As a result of the campaign that the Labour party has maintained throughout the past year on behalf of leaseholders, the Government have moved to some extent to deal with these problems. Later, we shall debate the Government's failure to act adequately in other areas where there is a need for more effective action, but this is a proper and appropriate response to close the forfeiture loophole.

We very much welcome the requirement that leaseholders be informed, because there is a risk that, despite Parliament's best intentions, leaseholders may find themselves threatened with forfeiture without being told of their right to challenge the landlord's entitlement to seek forfeiture for a service charge dispute.

We welcome the new clause, which we believe will help leaseholders. It is part of a much wider package of measures of leasehold reform that is necessary, only part of which is addressed by the Bill; nevertheless, the new clause is a step in the right direction.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 97 and 98 agreed to.

Clause 79

DETERMINATION OF REASONABLENESS OF SERVICE CHARGES

Lords amendment: No. 99, in page 52, leave out lines 32 to 47 and insert—

("( ) The power to make regulations under section 74(1)(b) of the Rent Act 1977 (procedure of rent assessment committees) extends to prescribing the procedure to be followed in connection with any proceedings before a leasehold valuation tribunal under this Act.

( ) Such regulations may, in particular, make provision—

(a) for securing consistency where numerous applications under this Act are or may be brought in respect of the same or substantially the same matters; and

(b) empowering a leasehold valuation tribunal to dismiss an application, in whole or in part, on the ground that it is frivolous or vexatious or otherwise an abuse of the process of the tribunal."")

4.45 pm

Mr. Clappison: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 100 and 101, Lords amendment No. 102, Government amendments (a) and (b) in lieu thereof and Lords amendments Nos. 103, 104 and 129.

Mr. Clappison: We now come to the important subject of leasehold valuation tribunals. I shall invite the House to agree with the Lords in the amendments, save for Lords amendment No. 102, with which I shall invite the House to disagree.

The amendments make new provision for procedures to be followed by leasehold valuation tribunals when hearing service charge disputes. Lords amendment No. 99 makes provision for leasehold valuation tribunals to secure consistency in handling separate cases about the same issue. For example, if a number of tenants in a block challenge the same service charge, it may be convenient to hear the separate cases together. This mirrors procedures that are often followed in the county court and High Court. It also allows leasehold valuation tribunals to strike out frivolous or vexatious cases or those which are an abuse of process.

Lords amendment No. 101 allows leasehold valuation tribunals to apportion the reimbursement of fees, as they think appropriate to the circumstances of the case.

Lords amendment No. 103 allows the court to dispose of that part of the case which it has not remitted to a leasehold valuation tribunal, and to enforce the leasehold valuation tribunal's decision as a decision of the court.

Lords amendment No. 104 is a consequential amending definitional amendment.

Lords amendment No. 129 widens the Secretary of State's regulation-making powers to allow the possibility of having a "pre-trial review" before a single member of the tribunal, to clear the ground before the main hearing—another procedure that will be familiar to those who have used the courts, and often a way of shortening cases.

I shall now discuss Lords amendment No. 102 and Government amendments (a) and (b). I invite the House to disagree with Lords amendment No. 102 but to agree with Government amendments (a) and (b). The amendments concern the level of fees that may be charged

[Mr. Clappison]

by a leasehold valuation tribunal to an applicant under the new procedures for the resolution of service charge disputes.

It may help the House if I explain the background to the issues. The proposal to give this new jurisdiction to leasehold valuation tribunals was introduced by Government amendments to the Bill in Committee in this place. The initial provision on fees was that, taking one year with another, they should be sufficient to cover the full costs of providing this service.

The measures in the Bill to help protect leaseholders of residential properties were prompted by the bad actions of a minority of landlords who were imposing unreasonable, and in some cases outrageous, service charge demands. Any leaseholder who contested those claims was faced in some circumstances with the immediate threat of forfeiture and an action, usually in the High Court. There are measures in the Bill that deal with this abuse and provide that forfeiture proceedings can no longer be taken until the disagreement about service charges is resolved. This is a significant step to help leaseholders, an important part of our package of reforms which will materially improve the lot of leaseholders.

Leaving the problems of forfeiture to one side, leaseholders currently have the right to challenge unreasonable service charges or to seek to have a new manager appointed if they can show fault with the current manager, but these jurisdictions lie with the county court. The second stage of our proposals is therefore to switch these cases to the leasehold valuation tribunals.

This move has been widely welcomed, on the ground that the tribunal will offer leaseholders a much more effective and cheap method of taking action against the unreasonable behaviour of landlords. This is because leaseholders have found it extremely difficult to challenge freeholders' actions in the courts. Although the initial court fee may be low, leaseholders often face protracted and potentially expensive litigation, and if they lose the case they are exposed to the risk of paying the costs of both sides. Even in normal cases that last for, say, two days, the likely exposure to costs can run into thousands of pounds.

The advantages of going to leasehold valuation tribunals are considerable. They have quicker, less formal procedures, and there is no need for full legal representation. The tribunal will include a professional surveyor who is fully qualified to assess the technical arguments that are likely to arise.

The other important point is that tribunals cannot award costs, so the exposure of leaseholders to the risk of costs will be much reduced.

Those advantages to leaseholders should be kept in mind when considering the fee that should be paid for access to the tribunals. There was little discussion of the full cost recovery principle when the Bill was originally before the House. The matter arose chiefly in another place, when my noble Friend Lord Lucas explained that it was likely that the daily cost of dealing with service charge cases by a tribunal could be as much as £2,000. That does not mean that the fee for hearing any case would be that much, as a detailed fee structure has not been determined, but there was general concern that full cost recovery would lead to fees of a considerable amount that could wipe out much of the cost advantage of a tribunal compared with county courts.

Various amendments were debated that would seek to limit the amount of fees chargeable. On Third Reading in another place, the Government tabled an amendment to ensure that the fee did not exceed the cost of the service. That would have allowed a considerable element of flexibility to set the fees, either at full cost recovery or at any percentage point below 100 per cent. of costs. A similar amendment was carried in relation to the parallel and new procedures for the tribunal to deal with the appointment of a manager.

For the procedures on service charge disputes, amendment No. 102, moved by Lord Bledisloe, was accepted. It provides that fees for these cases should be no more than the comparable fees in the county court. That would have the effect of setting a maximum of £120 for each case. Much concern was also expressed by noble Lords on both sides of the other place that our proposals for fees to be levied by tribunals offend the basic principle that there should, allegedly, be no charge for access to justice.

I emphasise that such fears are not justified—in the sense that the principle of cost recovery is already established. Indeed, Lords amendment No. 102 accepts the principle of charging fees, as it refers to fees paid in the county court.

It was suggested in another place that it would be breaking new ground to allow tribunals to charge a fee, but that is not so. For instance, if there were an appeal against a case heard by a leasehold valuation tribunal, it would be dealt with by the Lands Tribunal, which has a long-established fee—in these cases, involving a charge of about £250.

I turn next to our reasons for not accepting amendment No. 102 and for tabling amendment (a), which would allow for a maximum fee of £500. We think, given the great advantages of access to the leasehold valuation tribunal, that it is right that applicants should contribute towards the costs of the service. I fully accept that the point of the leaseholder package is to help thousands of leaseholders who have been the subject of deplorable and aggressive behaviour by their landlords. I think that our package achieves that, but we have to have regard to competing demands on the public purse. I am sure that Opposition Members will agree that it is important to strike a careful balance in that respect.

As I have said, the Government amendment moved in another place would have allowed for less than full cost recovery, but our amendment today puts an explicit limit on the face of the Bill. A fee of £500 represents a reasonable balance which will still mean that a substantial proportion of the costs will have to be borne by the taxpayer. It represents an affordable amount, particularly as it will usually be shared between a group of leaseholders in a block of flats. The amendment allows the maximum to be changed by order, but only following an affirmative resolution of both Houses, which will offer hon. Members the opportunity for debate before any changes to the limit are made. We intend to use the power in the usual way to reflect cost changes from time to time.

This does not mean that everyone will pay £500. The precise fee structure has not been worked out and will be subject to wide consultation before this section is

commenced. The Bill already provides for mitigation of the fee in certain cases with respect to the financial position of the applicant. There is also a provision which allows the tribunal to require the other party to reimburse the applicant with the whole or part of the fee if that seems right in the circumstances.

Mr. David Ashby (North–West Leicestershire): In Committee, we all envisaged that these actions would be like any others—free. Suddenly and most unfortunately, charges are being introduced.

A fee of about £500 has been mentioned. An arbitrary sum like that is surely very odd. Is it more or less than one could expect if the case were dealt with in the county court?

Lastly, neither my hon. Friend nor I nor anyone else who served on the Committee seems to have thought of an idea that recently occurred to me—why not use magistrates courts? After all, they do licensing and matrimonial actions, so why cannot they deal with these issues too?

Mr. Clappison: As I said earlier, the initial provision on fees was that, taking one year with another, they should be sufficient to cover the full costs of providing the service. As for the amount of costs in the county court, my hon. Friend will know that the fees charged for the court service always include an arbitrary element. The advantage of the leasehold valuation tribunal is that the litigant will not be exposed to the risk of costs, as he would in the county court. My hon. Friend, with his long experience of county courts, will know that I refer to the costs of not just the litigant but the other party to action in the county court. That factor weighs heavily with many litigants and acts as a deterrent to their taking action.

I note my hon. Friend's point about magistrates courts. We believe that the right forum for this type of case is the leasehold valuation tribunal. My hon. Friend will have heard me describe the presence of a qualified surveyor on the tribunal. I am sure that he will agree that it is important for the members of the tribunal to have that sort of expertise. With it, they can make a fair evaluation of the facts much more quickly—another material advantage to be borne in mind.

When designing the fee structure, we will seek to construct a scale of charges that offers a degree of certainty to the applicant before the case starts; in other words, we will not seek to charge a fee relating to the length of the case. We will also see whether it is possible to design a sliding scale of fees relating to the value of the disputed sums—although in cases of this kind that might not prove straightforward.

The discussions that have taken place on this issue, particularly in another place, have been of considerable value in focusing attention on this important issue. What the Government propose strikes the right balance of fairness and equity for all parties. It will be vital to leaseholders and, with the maximum fee set at £500, we believe that it will give them a real opportunity for effective justice at an affordable price.

Mr. Raynsford: This is one of the most important groups of amendments to be considered this evening. It concerns justice for leaseholders and remedies against the abuse of service charges which all too many leaseholders have experienced in recent years. Throughout these debates, hon. Members have been all too well aware of the problems brought to our attention by a large number of leaseholders and their organisations, highlighting the way in which they have been exploited by far too many rogue landlords—many of whom bought the freehold for relatively little so as to be able to charge disproportionate sums in management, service and insurance charges.

In Committee, the hon. Member for North–West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby) highlighted some of those abuses. Other Committee members highlighted similar examples of crude and blatant exploitation of leaseholders by unscrupulous freeholders or managing agents. There was general agreement, I believe, that action had to be taken that provided redress and that made it possible for leaseholders to get redress without being deterred by the cost of challenging a freeholder through a legal system which could be expensive. The idea of going to the High Court, for example, to challenge a freeholder is nonsense. It is simply not possible for leaseholders to meet the costs envisaged in such an exercise.

5 pm

There was agreement, therefore, that we wanted a framework that would enable leaseholders to get justice quickly, expeditiously and cheaply. The concept that the leasehold valuation tribunal should be given scope for sorting out such disputes commanded wide support. The hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire has asked whether a magistrates court might take on the function. Until he raised the point, I had not considered that, because the leasehold valuation tribunal seemed to be the right and appropriate body, but the important point, which undoubtedly underlies his question, is the need for justice to be quick and cheap, and for people not to be deterred by the prospect of large fees or serious costs.

In Committee, therefore, we welcomed the concept of leasehold valuation tribunals performing these functions. To my knowledge—I will check *Hansard* carefully—no one raised the prospect of fees being charged for cases taken to the tribunals. Our assumption in Committee was that access to such tribunals would be free, in the same way as access to other tribunals has been free. It has been an important point of principle that people could take their case to a tribunal without being deterred by fees. That was certainly my understanding.

Mr. Ashby *indicated assent.*

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman nods to show that that was his understanding too.

For that reason, it was shocking when, in Committee in another place, Lord Lucas, the Government spokesman, announced that he envisaged fees and, when pressed on the scale of fees, said that they could be between £500 and £2,000 a day. The Government justified that by saying that that was the economic cost of dealing with the cases. Frankly, that is a fairly horrifying prospect, but, irrespective of that, fees on that scale would deter any leaseholder from taking their case to a leasehold valuation tribunal, simply because they would be unable to pay such charges.

Consequently, there was a substantial debate in another place, during Committee and Report and on Third Reading only last week, about the adverse impact of fees

[Mr. Raynsford]

being charged in leasehold valuation tribunals. During those debates, hon. Members from a wide range of different political parties highlighted the serious consequences of the Government's proposal to charge fees for access to the tribunals.

First, there is the obvious point about leaseholders not feeling able to take up their right to obtain justice because of a fear of the cost being prohibitive. Secondly, if the fee system were in place, there would be obvious scope for the unscrupulous landlord—we know that these measures are being introduced purely to provide redress against unscrupulous landlords—to intimidate a leaseholder by the prospect of substantial fees and costs. Thirdly—this became increasingly important in the debates in another place—there is the wider point of principle about free access to justice.

My noble Friend Lord Archer of Sandwell spoke for the whole House, I believe, when he raised the concern that this would be the thin end of wedge, saying that, if the Government got their way on charging fees for leasehold valuation tribunals, shortly, we would be hearing proposals for fees to be charged for other tribunals. Clearly, that anxiety exercised the minds of many Members of the other House.

Viscount Bledisloe, who moved amendment No. 102, which was ultimately successful, made the point that it was entirely inconsistent of the Government to suggest that, while citizens have access to other tribunals without having to pay a fee, those who wish to challenge service charges should be subject to a fee—a different treatment of leaseholders from that of other people seeking redress through tribunals.

As the House knows, the Government were defeated. As a result of amendment No. 102, which was supported across the political parties, an amendment in the Bill restricts steeply and properly the fee level that can be charged.

We have reservations about the whole concept of a fee being accepted at all, because there will still be discrimination. Leaseholders will be subject to fees when they try to get justice, whereas people seeking justice from a different tribunal will not be subject to a fee; but amendment No. 102 restricts the fee level to an amount that is similar to the one that could be charged in a county court.

There seems to be a measure of common sense behind that, despite my reservation, because a leaseholder would have the option and alternative of seeking justice in a county court instead of in a leasehold valuation tribunal. The restriction to the fee level chargeable in the county court, which I understand is about £115, is clearly a considerable improvement on the Government's original proposal.

In reaction, the Government have gradually withdrawn from their original position, which I suppose one could describe as the free market position, where the full cost of £2,000 a day could be charged. They are now seeking a limited cost of £500 for a case.

There is, however, an extraordinary inconsistency about the Government's position. Although they say that they are prepared to limit the cost to £500, they are still leaving in the Bill language that refers to the charge being no more than is necessary to cover the costs. The Minister will recognise that that phraseology still remains.

It is not only those of us who have reason to be sceptical about the Government's good intentions who will feel nervous about the fact that, while that phraseology is still there, Ministers have scope to come forward with the powers that they are giving themselves under their amendment and to say, "We need to change this figure. It may have been £500 in 1996, but in 1997 there may be a need to increase it because the cost is greater." No doubt we will be given the statistics and figures showing that the costs are higher and justifying an increase from £500. Therefore, the £500 figure, which is an arbitrary figure for which there is no logical justification, cannot be counted on as the maximum cost that a leaseholder might have to face.

There is still scope in the Bill for the Government to vary that amount by order, and there is provision in the Bill for the fees not to exceed the total cost. That link between the fee and the cost is extremely dangerous, and could lead to proposals to increase the fee. Even if it does not, £500 is a substantial sum, which would seriously deter many leaseholders on low incomes from seeking justice. We have had evidence from many organisations that represent leaseholders highlighting the extent to which people on modest incomes can be intimidated.

Mr. Ashby: The Bill is extremely important for leaseholders on low incomes, such as pensioners, who are being intimidated. It may not matter to young yuppies earning a lot of money, with properties with 999-year leases, but it means a lot to pensioners on fixed low incomes. The fee could seem extremely high to them.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is precisely leaseholders on middle to low incomes who are most likely to be intimidated and most likely to decline to use a leasehold valuation tribunal if they know that it will cost £500, because that sum might be beyond their means.

The Minister may say that the charge relates to service charges that could involve several hundred pounds and that it is therefore worth it, but pensioners budgeting on a tight income and worried about an increase in service charges from, say, £600 to £750 might consider the possible saving of £150 not to be worth arguing about if they must pay £500 in fees to take the case to a leasehold valuation tribunal. Why should they have to pay that fee? Why should not they be able to get affordable justice, given that tribunals normally operate on the principle that people should have access to justice and should not be deterred by a lack of means?

The Minister argued that the fee could be reimbursed if the leasehold valuation tribunal decided that the applicant had a meritorious case and the landlord did not. That might apply in some cases, but no one on a low income who was worried about whether he or she could afford the £500 would take the risk. If such people are worried that they cannot pay, they will not be reassured by the possibility—it is a mere possibility—that, if they are successful, the leasehold valuation tribunal may decide that the fee should be reimbursed.

The Government's proposal is extremely dangerous. It threatens the basis of what we argued for in Committee and thought the Government had accepted—that people on modest incomes should have access to justice without being deterred by the cost. Once again, it raises the spectre of leaseholders intimidated by unscrupulous rogue landlords being unable to get effective redress.

By linking the fees to those charged in a county court, Lords amendment No. 102 provides the Government with a modest fee. Although it is higher than we would want, the amendment limits it to a figure that would be, in almost every case, affordable. Moreover, it makes a proper connection between the fees charged in a leasehold valuation tribunal and those charged in a county court, so there is no possibility of inconsistency in the cost of justice between the two. The amendment passed by the House of Lords was important, as it incorporates the principle of affordable justice, and it deserves to be retained in the Bill.

The Government have been engaged in a retreat. Originally, they proposed large fees; they now propose slightly less onerous fees, but they still seek to impose fees that will deter some people from obtaining justice. They are making a dangerous move, which cuts across the principle that people should have access to justice without having to pay fees through tribunals. Their amendments should therefore be resisted, and I invite my hon. Friends to support Lords amendment No. 102, if necessary, in the Division Lobby.

Conservative Members often speak about the importance of leaseholders' rights. They must decide whether their loyalty lies with leaseholders or with the Government. Their failure to back leaseholders in the past, particularly in crucial votes on Report two months ago, led to the loss of some of the most important rights that we could have given leaseholders. It will be tragic if, tonight, leaseholders are confronted once again by a betrayal of their hopes for affordable justice because Conservative Members, who speak as though they support leaseholders, are not prepared to express that support in the Lobby. We shall press this issue and invite all those who believe that leasehold justice is important to join us in voting to retain the Lords amendment.

5.15 pm

Sir John Hunt (Ravensbourne): The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) referred to a "Government retreat". I would prefer to describe it as a sensible concession in response to concerns expressed by hon. Members here and in another place. I suppose that the nature of compromises means that they do not and cannot fully satisfy either side, but I am reasonably happy with the solution that my hon. Friend the Minister has put forward this afternoon in the form of amendment (a).

Originally, there were great fears that fees of £2,000 a day would be imposed. That would have inhibited people from going to leasehold valuation tribunals and would have undermined the point and purpose of such tribunals, which have deservedly been given a warm welcome by leaseholders throughout the country. I welcome the fact that the Government drew back from their original intention to impose full cost-basis fees.

The Government's concession reminds us of the useful role that the other place can play in matters of this kind. Without the debate to which the hon. Member for Greenwich referred, I doubt whether the Government would have made that compromise. I am sure that the concession will be given a qualified welcome by many leaseholders who look at these matters sensibly and realistically. They will not necessarily oppose the principle of levying fees provided that they are moderate and sensible. In many cases, £500 a day would be shared by several leaseholders taking a single case to a tribunal, so the sum would not be punitive.

The concession will be given a qualified welcome by my constituents, such as those who live on the Fair Acres estate, who have been subjected to a great deal of anxiety and harassment by their landlords over the years. I shall therefore support the Government in the Lobby tonight.

Mrs. Maddock: Amendment No. 102 is a classic case of giving with one hand and taking away with the other. We have seen that happen in Committee and throughout the Bill's proceedings in another place.

All hon. Members welcome the fact that leasehold valuation tribunals will assist leaseholders if they have severe problems. However, the tribunals will be of absolutely no use to many people if the cost is too high. In particular, I am concerned about elderly people. They worry about money and the hassle of going to the tribunal. If they are worried about whether they can afford to do so, they will not go to the tribunal.

The matter was extensively discussed in another place and I concur entirely with the comments of my noble Friend Baroness Hamwee on this matter. We are talking about access to justice—free access to justice. The Government have retreated on this matter: there will not be free access to justice, as we all thought at the beginning—there will be costs.

The Government's amendments give Ministers the power to change the limit, although they are trying to convince us that it is £500. That is totally unacceptable. I concur with what was decided in another place. I fully support amendment No. 102, as passed in another place.

Mr. Ashby: The debate has reminded me of something that happened to me some years ago when I was successfully demolishing a prosecution case. The judge was getting more and more irate as he saw the case disappearing and he said to me, "Do you know how much it costs per minute to run this court?" I replied, "I agree that it costs a large amount of money, but what price justice?" Today, we are dealing with justice; we are dealing with something that the Government have recognised and acted on, to their enormous credit.

The Government have appreciated that people go to the London auction houses and see freeholds on 999-year leases being auctioned. We are not talking about the great estates or the decent people—we are talking about people who are out to make a fast buck, about the rip-off merchants. It is no good talking about the sanctity of contracts, about people agreeing that they had a 999-year lease and about people being subject to a contract that they are trying to break. We are talking about rip-off merchants who go out and buy freeholds and then see how much they and their successors can rip off the leaseholder in the following 999 years. I am fundamentally opposed to the whole system, but that is not what we are debating today.

I shall explain to my hon. Friend the Minister why I shall support him in the Lobby today, but I want him to understand what he needs to do in terms of regulation. I declare an interest because I shall talk about my personal case and what I am going to do. I want my hon. Friend to work his regulations so that I can do the best thing possible in my case. That is the best way that I can illustrate what I believe should be done.

My property was sold off to some rip-off merchants, who formed a company called Raleigh Estates, which is really run by a firm of surveyors called Wallakers—

[Mr. Ashby]

I suspect that it owns a number of properties. It purchased a 999-year lease on a small block of four flats. I am incensed by this behaviour, not because I mind—I earn enough money to pay the insurance—but because it is ripping people off. I loathe being ripped off.

I know that individual flats can be insured for about £180 a year, but that Wallakers has gone to great lengths to ensure that the insurance costs in excess of £390 a year. The terms of the lease say that Wallakers must nominate the insurers and that it is the agent. I believe that the Monopolies and Mergers Commission should look at this matter. There is a tie-up between the major insurance companies and companies such as Wallakers.

The insurance companies do not receive the money direct—they go through Wallakers, and Wallakers gets 15 per cent. I know that 15 per cent. of £180 is not very much, but 15 per cent. of £390 is a good deal more. It is in the interests of the rip-off merchants, such as Wallakers, to get the highest possible insurance they can—they rip us off so that they can get the highest possible return. We have to do something about this.

There are only four flats in my block. One of the tenants is a young computer man and he can afford it. However, one of the tenants is an old-age pensioner. We tried to buy the freehold and had an enormous number of problems. Wallakers puts in every impediment that it can—it does not reply to letters. I have instructed solicitors in this regard, and they cannot get anywhere. Time and time again, we are getting absolutely nowhere. We are all fed up.

The solution is to take the management out of the hands of Wallakers—and as quickly as possible. It will be left with £15 a year and it will have to decide whether it is worth it. We will say, "You can stuff it, Wallakers, we will carry on with the management. You can just get your £15 a year." That is what we want to do.

I want us to get the regulations right. I accept that we must have a limit of £500. The Treasury is giving Departments absolute hell, and I accept that we must have some sort of compromise. Hon. Members have to remember that, in the case that I am talking about, there are not 200 flats—if there are 200 flats, it will be only £5 or £10 a person—but only four, and it costs a lot more.

I hope that the regulations will cover not only the cost of what we are trying to do but the number of applicants. I hope that there can be a scale of fees that will take those factors into account. One should be able to go swiftly, quickly and cheaply before the tribunal. I should like the management to be in my hands—I would get three quotes from insurance companies and I would not charge 15 per cent. There are only four of us and I shall get the others to pay a direct debit to the insurance company and away we will go. There will be no problems at all and no one will be ripped off.

I want my hon. Friend to think about the scale of charges and about the limit of £500. He should also think about the bottom end and grade it according to the number and to the scale—according to what is required and what is requested. There are a number of ways of getting it right. I accept that things will change. After all, £500 is a reasonable sum of money today but, in 20 years time—especially if the Labour party gets into power and causes inflation to rise—it will seem like only £5. I accept that there will have to be some change in the years ahead to take account of inflation, if nothing else.

In keeping with everything that we have said, I am sure that my hon. Friend's Department will honour the spirit that it is £500 today and that it may have to be changed in the years ahead. We need justice that is cheap and swift. We need justice in this matter.

Mr. Dudley Fishburn (Kensington): The story of leasehold reform is a strange one, and this set of amendments most perfectly typifies what is so strange about it. The push for leasehold reform has come from Conservative voters, home owners and a million people who have sunk a lot of money into their homes and found that their homes, under our leasehold system, are second-class homes.

Despite the charming words of the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), the articulateness of the leasehold reform campaign has been provided by Conservative Members, who enabled the previous three Leasehold (Reform) Acts to be passed.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman argues that the case for leasehold reform has been made by Conservative Members. Perhaps he will tell the House who voted for leaseholders' right to manage and to do away with the low-rent test, and why he voted with the Government and with all his Conservative colleagues against leaseholders' interests on those two issues?

5.30 pm

Mr. Fishburn: I did not mean to stir up this pot at this time. I divided the House on the low-rent test, and I voted with the hon. Member for Greenwich on the most recent Leasehold (Reform) Bill—which gets to the point that I should like to make. While leasehold reform is in the Conservative interest, and Conservative Members have articulated that interest, often the Government have been the slowest, most reluctant and most diluted in their approach to it.

The amendments are to be hugely welcomed, as are the concessions that have been gained. However, they should have been in an Act of two years ago. We were told then, of course, that it was completely impossible for leaseholders to have access to the right to manage, in the same way that we were told that the low-rent test was an essential part of leasehold law. Now, courtesy of the good work done by the Government, that low-rent test has been all but abolished, and leaseholders will have a right to go to a leasehold valuation tribunal to win the ability to manage. However, it is little, it is late, and it is not the last word on the subject.

What is certain is that the topics that we have been discussing as the Bill has passed through the House, and most particularly this set of amendments, will be revisited in the years ahead. That has nothing to do with the ambitions of the hon. Member for Greenwich—who, if ever he does come to the Dispatch Box, will probably come to it as an Agriculture Minister rather than as a Minister for anything to do with the Department of the

Environment—but it has everything to do with the slow, reluctant and rather muddled way in which we revise property law in this country.

My guess is that the amendments will return in another Housing Bill, that the Bill is by no means the last word and that, in 2010, leaseholders will not be going to a leasehold valuation tribunal, paying their £500 and winning the right to manage.

I am delighted that the concessions have been made, that a cap has been established and that Front Benchers have—although it is little and late—done the right thing. As one more step along the path of proper leasehold reform, the measures are much to be welcomed.

Mr. Clappison: I think that hon. Members are familiar with the background of how some tenants have suffered at the hands of certain landlords. Certainly we believe that our package of reforms will be of real assistance to many tenants who have suffered in that manner. This reform—the establishment of the leasehold valuation tribunal—will be an important part of that package.

The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) raised the issue of unscrupulous landlords who would try to exploit the provisions in the same way in which they have exploited other provisions, causing fear and trepidation for tenants. I should tell him that the provision to which I referred in my opening remarks is perhaps one that the courts will want to consider, particularly in the context of landlords' behaviour. We have set out a provision that allows a tribunal to require the other party to reimburse the applicant for all or part of the fee if it seems appropriate in the circumstances. There is no doubt that tribunals will want to examine carefully the type of behaviour by landlords that he mentioned.

The hon. Member for Greenwich, and the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock), mentioned the order and the possibility of increasing the sum of £500. I respectfully draw their attention to the fact that that would require an affirmative resolution and to what I have already said about that matter—that the order will be dealt with in the normal way and that it will occasionally reflect changes in cost. It is sensible to have such a provision for change. It does not mean necessarily that change will be brought in tomorrow, but it is sensible to have such provision for it.

Various hon. Members have mentioned people on low incomes. The Bill contains provision for the tribunal to mitigate the fee if the applicant is on a low income. We have not yet decided how to implement that provision in detail, but we shall be consulting on it. I can tell the House that it is likely that we will passport the current support regime—such as income support—as a basis for the operation of that mitigation. The fee will be mitigated in full or in part if the applicant qualifies.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ravensbourne (Sir J. Hunt) for his expression of support—which, in his case, comes after a very careful consideration of the provisions.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn). It is fair to say, on any view, that he has played a most distinguished and well-documented part in the history of leasehold reform.

I listened carefully to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for North–West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby), who I know cares deeply about this subject. He put it admirably when he said that justice in such circumstances should come swiftly and cheaply. In response to his concern, I can tell him that the precise fee structure has not yet been worked out. We will, however, of course be guided by the type of considerations to which I have already adverted. He is as anxious as we are that we should have effective justice at an affordable price. We believe that these provisions will achieve that.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment Nos. 100 and 101 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 102, in page 53, line 36, leave out from ("securing") to end of line 39 and insert

("that the amount of the fees charged is no more than would, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, be chargeable for similar proceedings in the county court.")

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Clappison.]*

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 265, Noes 217.

Division No. 207] **[5.36 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas–Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger

Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson–Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, John
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Michael
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox–Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thumham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Derek Conway and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joseph
Austin–Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Miss Kate
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hutton, John
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staffs)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald

Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Killoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretf'd)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'ld)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Sir James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Orme, Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Peter
Short, Ms Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and
Mr. Eric Martlew.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendments made in lieu of the Lords amendment: (a), in page 53, line 35, leave out from first 'order' to end of line 39 and insert—

'subject to this limit, that the fees payable in respect of any one application or reference by the court together with any proceedings before the tribunal arising out of that application or reference shall not exceed £500 or such other amount as may be specified by order of the Secretary of State.'.

(b), in page 54, line 6, leave out 'which, unless the order' and insert—

'( )No order altering the limit under subsection (3) shall be made unless a draft of the order has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

( ) Any other order under this section, unless it'.—[*Mr. Brandreth.*]

Lords amendments Nos. 103 and 104 agreed to.

Clause 81

APPOINTMENT OF MANAGER

Lords amendment: No. 105, in page 55, line 29, after ("made)") insert

(", in paragraph (a) (breach of obligation by landlord), omit sub-paragraph (ii) (requirement that circumstances likely to continue).

( ) In that subsection,")

Mr. Clappison: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 106 to 113, Lords amendment No. 114, Government amendments (b) and (c) and Opposition amendment (a) in lieu thereof, Lords amendments Nos. 278 to 285, Lords amendment No. 286 and Government amendments (a) and (b) in lieu thereof.

Mr. Clappison: We now come to a group of amendments that deal with applications to the leasehold valuation tribunal for the appointment of a manager. At the appropriate time, I shall ask the House to disagree with Lords amendment No. 114 and Opposition amendment (a) in lieu thereof.

These amendments make a number of changes to clauses 81 and 82 and to schedule 5, which establish the right of a tenant of a flat to apply to a leasehold valuation tribunal for the appointment of a manager on the ground that the landlord is in some way falling short in his management responsibilities.

Amendments Nos. 105 and 279 concern the grounds for appointing a manager set out in the existing legislation: that the landlord is in breach of his obligations under the lease and that this breach is likely to continue. The amendment deletes the second part. Also, under the two additional grounds introduced by clause 81, there is no express requirement for the tribunal to take account of the likely future behaviour of the landlord. This amendment therefore ensures a degree of consistency between the three grounds which the tribunal will have to consider and, most importantly, should improve the chances of tenants succeeding in cases where a history of bad management can be demonstrated.

Amendments Nos. 112 and 285 restrict the right of appeal from an LVT to the lands tribunal in cases for the appointment of a manager, by requiring that leave to appeal must be first obtained from either the LVT or the lands tribunal. An appeal will be possible only with the approval of either tribunal. That parallels the appeal procedures that we have introduced in relation to the new jurisdiction contained in clause 79 for leasehold valuation tribunals to determine the reasonableness of service charges.

Amendment No. 108 would require the LVT, when considering an application from a landlord for an order appointing a manager to be discharged, to be satisfied that the variation or discharge would not lead to a recurrence of the problems which led to the making of the original order and that it is just and convenient in all the circumstances of the case to vary or discharge the order.

I intend to ask the House to support Government amendments (b) and (c) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 114; Lords amendment No. 286 and Government amendments (a) and (b) in lieu thereof, and to resist Lords

[Mr. Clappison]

amendment No. 114 and Opposition amendment (a) in lieu thereof. In effect, the issues here are very similar to those we have just discussed in relation to the level of fees chargeable by the tribunal for dealing with service charge disputes.

The new jurisdiction given to the LVT to consider applications by leaseholders for the appointment of an independent manager will run in parallel. This is an important new right for leaseholders to secure the efficient management of their homes, and it offers them a respite from an unsatisfactory or oppressive landlord. We have modified and strengthened the grounds that the LVT can consider when deciding whether a new manager should be appointed, and we have made it more difficult for the old landlord to come back and simply ask for another chance to do the job properly, without demonstrating clearly to the tribunal that he has mended his ways.

The current position in the Bill on fees for these cases is not the same as for the service charge procedures. A Government amendment on Third Reading in another place was accepted, so the Bill currently states that the level of fees must not exceed the cost of providing the service. As I said earlier, this gives the Government considerable flexibility in setting an adequate fee structure, but there is a very strong argument for establishing a maximum limit of £500 in each case, in exactly the same manner as for the service charge procedures. We will then adopt a closely parallel fee structure for the two procedures, which will be of great benefit in helping leaseholders to understand what is involved and in deciding which procedure would be most suitable for them.

For the same reasons as I gave at length in relation to the previous group of amendments, I cannot accept the Opposition's amendment, which would establish a very low maximum level of fee of about £120. The issues are similar. I believe that we have struck the right balance to provide for effective justice for tenants at an affordable price.

Mr. Raynsford: We have before us very clear evidence of the problems caused by large-scale alterations to Bills at the last possible moment. Substantial amendments were made on Third Reading in the other place last Wednesday. Amendments and starred amendments have been tabled, with Government manuscript amendments being submitted only today because, at the last minute, the Government realised that there was an inconsistency between what they are doing in one part of the Bill and what they are doing in another.

Before we get to the substance of this debate, I must tell the Minister that this is no way to proceed with a crucial issue such as leasehold reform. Once again, last-minute changes are being made in a hurry without proper time to consider them and without opportunity for proper scrutiny. I say clearly tonight that this will not be the last word. The hon. Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) said the same in the previous debate. This cannot be the final word on leasehold reform. We will need to return to the issue, because the Bill goes only some way towards resolving the problems, and does even that in an inherently unsatisfactory way.

Through this series of amendments, we are dealing with the whole issue of the management of leasehold blocks. We are considering the problems faced by leaseholders who have incompetent or, frankly, unscrupulous and dishonest landlords. We know of examples of landlords who have failed to do the things that they ought to have done and who have not maintained their blocks properly. Often, that has been because of incompetence—but we also know of a new breed of rogue landlords who have been determined to abuse their privileges and use their powers as freeholders to intimidate and extort more money from their leaseholders than they should pay for various charges. It is to provide redress against incompetence on the one side and dishonesty and extortion on the other that new measures are required to give leaseholders rights and to prevent landlords from abusing the system.

When the matter was debated in Committee, thoroughly and in detail, the Committee rightly voted for a simple and effective remedy: the right to manage. That remedy was advocated by the Labour party in its policy paper on leasehold reform issues, "An End to Feudalism", as the simplest and most effective way of giving leaseholders proper redress and ensuring that, if confronted with an incompetent or dishonest landlord, they could take matters into their own hands and take over management of the block, thereby ending the abuse.

6 pm

That right to manage mirrors an equivalent right that the Government have given to council tenants. It is a clear, simple, straightforward mechanism, and it would have been the right solution. It is common sense that those who have the greatest interest in the future management of a property—the leaseholders—should themselves be able to take on the responsibility if they feel that they can discharge it better than the freeholder. The remedy is effective, because it sends unscrupulous landlords a clear message that, if they fail to provide a good service, the leaseholders will be able to take over management; but it is not against the interests of good landlords.

Along with others, I have made that point on many occasions. There is no threat to the good landlord who does not exploit tenants, and charges a reasonable amount for services. In such circumstances, leaseholders would not want to take over management, because they would not be able to make any savings or provide a more efficient service. Equally, given the way in which the right to manage was proposed, it would have provided a proper safeguard for landlords' interests by ensuring their representation on the management company.

Despite all those strong arguments in favour of a right to manage, however, the Government chose on Report to vote down the proposal, albeit by a narrow margin. We have now been presented with the alternative—which is very much a second best—of an opportunity for leaseholders to seek redress by means of a leasehold valuation tribunal. The earlier arrangement laid down in the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987, allowing leaseholders to seek redress through the courts, has proved entirely ineffective. It has not enabled leaseholders to get rid of unscrupulous or incompetent landlords; the number of cases in which leaseholders have obtained orders to change the management of their blocks has been derisory.

This procedure depends on leaseholders' having to demonstrate fault. That will cause difficulties: it is not the simple, clear-cut procedure that applies when leaseholders say that they wish to take over the management of a

property because they are confident that they can manage it better than the freeholder. They will have to present a case, and demonstrate that the landlord has been at fault. It will be difficult to prove fault, and there will be opportunities for unscrupulous landlords—often aided and abetted by crafty lawyers—to try to get around the provisions. This will not be a satisfactory alternative; moreover, the issue of costs will arise again.

We have discussed that issue in previous debates, and I will not detain the House by repeating the arguments at length. Suffice it to say that a leaseholder with a bad landlord who is not managing the property decently will be nervous about seeking redress through the leasehold valuation tribunal if the cost will be a £500 fee, with no guarantee of reimbursement. The same deterrent will apply as in the case of service charge disputes, which we debated earlier.

We are dealing with a serious problem, which requires a proper, long-term solution. The Government are offering only a limited and partial response, which is typical of their approach to leasehold reform. While they, and Conservative Back Benchers, are only too happy to protest their support for leaseholders and to say that they favour leasehold reform, when it comes to the crunch they repeatedly vote for measures that do not provide leaseholders with proper and effective remedies. On Report, when we had the opportunity to keep the right to manage in the Bill, all the Conservative Members who had spoken so passionately about leaseholders' interests voted with the Government to destroy that right. That is an indication of the extent to which the Conservative party has betrayed leaseholders' interests.

The truth is that the Tory party is still financially dependent on a number of large landowners. Those landowners may not attend meetings of the Premier Club. They probably do not need to: they already have close lines of communication with the party which are, as it were, paved with gold, or at least with financial donations. It is because of its dependence on the money of the big landowners that the Conservative party has consistently failed to defend leaseholders' interests, and has consistently shilly-shallied, and backed away from thorough-going reform. We are seeing the same process tonight: a failure to accept the need for effective, cheap remedies—for justice that is simple, straightforward and inexpensive. Instead, we are being offered a complicated and less than satisfactory alternative, for which leaseholders will have to pay more than they can afford in many cases.

I invite all hon. Members who really care about leasehold reform to join us in the Lobby to support the principle of genuine reform, and to fight properly for the interests of leaseholders.

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): I listened with pleasure to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) before we got down to the substance of the Lords amendments. I smiled, because I remembered how often the hon. Gentleman had congratulated the Government in Committee on the manner in which they had responded to arguments, and had said how much the Bill was being improved by our actions. I even remember the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) deriving enormous pleasure from the first concession made to her by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration.

I felt some sympathy with the hon. Member for Greenwich in regard to what we were having to cope with today, and thought that he put his point with a degree of charm. He spoke with pride, however, about the behaviour of members of his party and its Governments in connection with leasehold reform. I have represented my constituency since 1977. The leasehold reform legislation passed before then was passed under the auspices of Labour Governments, and the hon. Gentleman deludes himself if he thinks that those Governments did not leave problems behind, with which leaseholders had to wrestle following 1967 and 1974.

A moment ago, the hon. Gentleman launched an implicit attack on the principle of amendments made on Third Reading in the House of Lords. We fully understand that, were the country to be unwise enough to elect a Labour Government, the constitution would be turned upside down; but I personally consider amendments on Third Reading in the House of Lords to be one of the glories of the constitution. They enable us to make corrections to Bills at the last possible moment, although, on the ping-pong principle, they will return to this House thereafter. I remember that, back in the early days of the 1979 Administration, an amendment on Third Reading to another DOE Bill, which was of immense importance to my constituents, was agreed to. I would be very sorry if such a device disappeared.

We heard the familiar inveighing of the hon. Member for Greenwich against landowners and their relationships with my party. I referred to it as proto-marxist theory in Committee and I am perfectly happy to do so again. He sought to be disarming in Committee and to say that the Labour party's views had no wider implications for property law or contract law. All I can say is that we will listen to that in future.

I have sympathy for the hon. Member for Greenwich on one point: the process through which we have all necessarily been put as a result of the manner in which the Bill has proceeded. I would welcome a response from my hon. Friend the Minister on it. It relates simply to the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors' code, which was alluded to at an earlier stage as being what would inform the conduct of the leasehold valuation tribunal in considering applications for the right to manage.

My hon. Friend has drawn attention to the fact that there will be a surveyor on the tribunal who will be able to judge the appropriate law and conditions relating to the matters. When we discussed the matters before, the code was very much in draft form and was being discussed with interested parties. Some assurance was given that its final form would either be available before the Bill completed its passage through the House or fairly soon afterwards. I understand that, as a statutory instrument, it is likely to be available fairly soon afterwards.

I make not a complaint but a point, which is in line with the views expressed by the hon. Member for Greenwich. Leaseholders have been in touch with me to ask whether I have seen the code, think it is satisfactory, or agree that it is unsatisfactory. I inquired at the only place where one can inquire—the RICS. It properly says that, because the document is in draft form, it is being discussed with interested parties and is not available to Members of Parliament.

We therefore find ourselves in the slightly ironical position that, in order for the DOE to come to a conclusion on whether the code—and thus the statutory

[Mr. Peter Brooke]

instrument—should be recommended to Ministers, leaseholders are allowed access to it and may hold views on it, but Members of Parliament who represent those leaseholders have no idea what it contains. Although I do not blame the RICS for regarding the draft code as a privileged document that should not be available to us, it is an unsatisfactory element in the evolution of policy that we shall eventually be asked to vote on a document that we cannot amend, when there might have been a better way in which to conduct consultation at an earlier stage.

Mr. Clappison: With the leave of the House, I should like to reply to the debate.

This has been an interesting short debate. I emphasise to the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) that we come to the problem from a common background. The concern among Conservative Members on behalf of leaseholders is no less than he expressed. We certainly recognise the problems that some leaseholders have experienced as a result of the behaviour of certain landlords. My hon. Friend the Member for North–West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby) has spoken eloquently on the subject. The package of reforms that we have introduced, including these amendments, targets the problems caused by bad landlords. That is as true of the provisions that we make for the right to manage when there has been bad practice by landlords as it is with the other provisions that we have introduced.

I do not want to go over the wider ground of the right to manage, but I take issue with the hon. Member for Greenwich on what he said about leaseholders. We believe that the amendments will be of real benefit to leaseholders who seek the right to manage as a result of bad practice by landlords. It is no use saying that leaseholders who do not have problems with their landlords will not want to take advantage of such provisions, or, indeed, of a general right to manage such as that postulated by the hon. Gentleman.

We are concerned about leaseholders who we know are experiencing bad practice, unreasonable behaviour, poor standards of maintenance, unreasonable service charges and all the rest. The amendments will give such leaseholders the opportunity to seek the right to manage by challenging what the landlord has done. We do not believe that it will be as difficult as the hon. Member for Greenwich envisages for them to prove that the landlord is at fault. We think that the courts will want to consider the sort of circumstances that we have described and base a finding of fault on them.

6.15 pm

My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), who has played a most constructive role in Committee and speaks with great knowledge and authority on the subject, raised the important issue of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors code. I can tell him that the code is in the final stage of completion and it is hoped that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will approve it shortly. It has previously been the subject of consultation, and I understand that the RICS has consulted the DOE on it and on its timing.

I shall certainly take up the important point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South about privilege and access of Members of Parliament to the code. He spoke with great authority and clarity on the subject, as he did on the way in which the House must consider the amendments. He was absolutely right to emphasise the way in which we have approached the matter.

It is rather difficult to listen to debates and to try to respond to meritorious arguments and then be chastised for making changes in the light of such debates. We have taken such a course throughout the proceedings and think that it has borne fruit. The amendments will be an important benefit for tenants who seek the right to manage when they have suffered at the hands of bad landlords.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 106 to 113 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 114, in page 57, line 35, leave out ("is sufficient to meet") and insert ("does not exceed")

Motion made, and Question put, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

The House divided: Ayes 261, Noes 227.

Division No. 208] **[6.16 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas–Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger

Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson–Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, John
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Michael
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox–Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Richard Ottaway.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joseph
Austin–Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hutton, John
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staffs)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald

Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretf'd)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'ld)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Sir James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Orme, Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Ms Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and
Mr. Eric Martlew.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendments made in lieu of the Lords amendment: (b), in page 57, line 33, leave out from first 'order' to end of line 37 and insert

'subject to this limit, that the fees payable in respect of any one application or reference by the court together with any proceedings before the tribunal arising out of that application or reference shall not exceed £500 or such other amount as may be specified by order of the Secretary of State.'.

(c), in page 58, line 2, leave out 'which, unless the order' and insert—

'( ) No order altering the limit under subsection (3) shall be made unless a draft of the order has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

( ) Any other order under this section, unless it'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 115, before clause 85, to insert the following new clause—*Application of right of first refusal in relation to contracts*—

".—(1) After section 4 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 (relevant disposals) insert—

"Application of provisions to contracts.

4A.—(1) The provisions of this Part apply to a contract to create or transfer an estate or interest in land, whether conditional or unconditional and whether or not enforceable by specific performance, as they apply in relation to a disposal consisting of the creation or transfer of such an estate or interest.

As they so apply—

(a) references to a disposal of any description shall be construed as references to a contract to make such a disposal;

(b) references to making a disposal of any description shall be construed as references to entering into a contract to make such a disposal; and

(c) references to the transferee under the disposal shall be construed as references to the other party to the contract and include a reference to any other person to whom an estate or interest is to be granted or transferred in pursuance of the contract.

(2) The provisions of this Part apply to an assignment of rights under such a contract as is mentioned in subsection (1) as they apply in relation to a disposal consisting of the transfer of an estate or interest in land.

As they so apply—

(a) references to a disposal of any description shall be construed as references to an assignment of rights under a contract to make such a disposal;

(b) references to making a disposal of any description shall be construed as references to making an assignment of rights under a contract to make such a disposal;

(c) references to the landlord shall be construed as references to the assignor; and

(d) references to the transferee under the disposal shall be construed as references to the assignee of such rights.

(3) The provisions of this Part apply to a contract to make such an assignment as is mentioned in subsection (2) as they apply (in accordance with subsection (1)) to a contract to create or transfer an estate or interest in land.

(4) Nothing in this section affects the operation of the provisions of this Part relating to options or rights of pre-emption.".

(2) In section 4(2) of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 (relevant disposals: excluded disposals), for paragraph (i) (certain disposals in pursuance of existing obligations) substitute—

"(i) a disposal in pursuance of a contract, option or right of pre-emption binding on the landlord (except as provided by section 8D (application of sections 11 to 17 to disposal in pursuance of option or right of pre-emption));".

(3) In section 20(1) (interpretation), in the definition of "disposal" for "has the meaning given by section 4(3)" substitute "shall be construed in accordance with section 4(3) and section 4A (application of provisions to contracts)"."

6.30 pm

Mr. Clappison: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 116 to 121, 248 and 287, Lords amendment No. 287, Government amendment (a) thereto and Lords amendment No. 321.

Mr. Clappison: These amendments on the right of first refusal caused some controversy in another place but I hope that I shall be able to do justice to the changes. They would make significant changes to part I of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 and are necessary to accommodate three important elements.

First, they would make it a criminal offence for the landlord of a block of flats to fail to offer his interest to the tenants when he wishes to sell. The criminal offence was introduced as the Bill proceeded through this House, but was extended by Lords amendment No. 118 to cover a landlord's contravention of any prohibition or restriction imposed on him, such as when a landlord serves a notice but goes ahead with a sale without waiting for the tenants' response.

The second element provides for certain special cases, such as sale by auction, which was the subject of a commitment given in the House, and deals with grants of options or right of pre-emption and how to manage when the landlord's price includes a non-monetary element.

Thirdly—this precipitated some significant changes, especially through Lords amendment No. 287—there is the need to specify when a relevant disposal takes place, especially in view of the criminal offence. When a transaction includes an exchange of contracts, that exchange will be the relevant disposal. That will crystallise the offence if the landlord has not offered his interest to the tenants by that stage.

The necessity for changing substantial parts of the measure also gave the opportunity to recast other parts of the Bill so that it will be easier to follow and to use. It was the accommodation of the principle that an exchange of contracts can be a relevant disposal that required the amendments.

Mr. Raynsford: We are dealing with a third category of leasehold problems—the failure of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 to provide the supposed opportunity for leaseholders to acquire the freehold of their homes when the freeholder chooses to dispose of it. That was the intention of the 1987 Act, but it has not in practice proved an easy or problem-free route for leaseholders seeking to acquire the freehold of their homes.

The most notable case that demonstrated the failure was that involving Smith's Charity which, despite its benevolent-sounding name, acted malevolently to its leaseholders when it chose to dispose of its freehold interest last summer to a another landowner, the Wellcome Trust, without offering its leaseholders the right of first refusal that it was supposed to offer under the 1987 Act. That prompted a wave of public protest and pressure for changes in the law, which has undoubtedly influenced the Housing Bill towards the changes in the amendments.

The charity's action also prompted a case against it by the leaseholders affected, which partially overcame the problem but left a highly confusing judgment that suggested that the applicable date for the duty to notify the leaseholders of their right to first refusal was not the date at which the contracts were exchanged but that at which the sale was completed. Given that the circumstances of many property sales could mean their not being completed for several years, and that during that time leaseholders would have no opportunity to exercise their rights, that was nonsense.

Equally, even where the sale occurred without a protracted period before completion, it would be nonsense if leaseholders were not entitled to receive a notice of the proposed disposal at the time at which the contract was entered into. The problem was brought to public attention as a result of the court case, and the issue exercised us considerably in Committee.

The Minister and other Conservative Members commented on the Opposition's objections to the large number of amendments. We have no objection to the changes being made to improve the Bill; we object only to the procedure, which has involved an enormous raft of amendments being presented to us at very short notice. The Lords Third Reading was last Wednesday. It was only mid-morning on Thursday that we received the list of amendments—329 of them, some very long. To comply with the normal requirements of the House, notice of amendments to the amendments had to be with the Clerks by the end of business that very day.

To go through such a volume of amendments, seek to make intelligent observations and table amendments to them was quite a process. Lords amendment No. 287 is a new schedule of 21 pages and contains significant changes, many of which were entirely new. While it built on comments made in Committee, it involved forms of legislation that were not already in the public domain. There are new concepts that require careful scrutiny, and we have been unable to give them the scrutiny we would normally like to give them. It is the procedure and the timetable to which we object rather than the fact of the Bill being amended and improved—we welcome the fact that it is being improved.

There have been a series of last-minute changes to remedy some of the problems of the present procedure and make it easier for leaseholders to exercise their right of first refusal as and when a landowner decides to dispose of a property. We welcome that change and will not oppose any of the amendments in the group, because they take forward a process that should have been completed in 1987, but has required a great deal more attention because of the failure of the 1987 Act.

We are concerned about the scope that still exists for landlords to abuse the system by devious means, even when notionally complying with the letter of the law. I have received representations from leaseholders living in Connaught mews in the London borough of Greenwich. They live not in the constituency that I have the honour to represent, but in the borough of Greenwich. They have had the most appalling experience when trying to acquire the freehold of their homes.

I have corresponded with the Minister about the case, so he will be familiar with it. I shall not go through the details now. Suffice to say that, when the leaseholders eventually prised out of the freeholder details of the price that they had to pay to acquire the freehold and got to the stage that they believed they could proceed with the purchase, the freeholder came up with a disreputable device to prevent them from exercising that right, by claiming that they were out of time. While the

[Mr. Raynsford]

leaseholders sought the information to enable their application to proceed, the clock had continued to tick and the time scale for exercising the right of first refusal had passed.

Such exploitation of the loopholes by unscrupulous freeholders is characteristic of the problems that leaseholders have confronted; we have exposed them and want to block them. I fear that a loophole that allows freeholders to get around the legislation will not be closed by the measures that we are agreeing. It will be astonishing if legislation that has been prepared in such a hurry, with so little opportunity for detailed scrutiny, proves to be entirely problem-free.

I remind hon. Members that the 1987 Act was passed in a great hurry, just before the 1987 election, to give the impression that the Government were acting on behalf of leaseholders—and that its failure is the cause of the amendments. That Act was put together in too great haste. There was not proper time for detailed scrutiny, so, sadly, it was not put on the statute book in a form that made it possible for leaseholders to take full advantage of it. It is riddled with loopholes, has proved unsatisfactory and now has to be amended.

Although what we are doing in this group of amendments is, in principle, the right thing—making it easier for leaseholders to get the right of first refusal so that they can buy the freehold of their home when the freeholder chooses to dispose of it—the way in which we are doing it, through a huge mass of last-minute amendments and without the proper time for scrutiny, will inevitably result in loopholes or legal difficulties, which will prove problematic. I fear that this is yet another area of leasehold reform that will require revisiting. Having said that, we will not oppose the amendments, because they make legislation that is thoroughly unsatisfactory better.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 116 to 121 agreed to.

Clause 95

RECOVERY OF POSSESSION WHERE GRANT INDUCED BY FALSE STATEMENT

Lords amendment: No. 122, in page 63, line 37, at end insert (", or

(b) a person acting at the tenant's instigation.".")

Mr. Clappison: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendment No. 147.

Mr. Clappison: The amendment introduces a new discretionary ground for possession for assured tenancies where the landlord has been

"induced to grant the tenancy by a false statement made knowingly or recklessly by the tenant."

It extends the ground to cover false statements provided by a third party at the tenant's instigation.

Lords amendment No. 147 extends the deceit ground for possession for secure tenancies.

6.45 pm

Mr. Raynsford: We agree with the purpose of the Government's actions, but are troubled by the way in which the amendment has been drafted. Lords amendment No. 122 would add a second category to the category of people who knowingly or recklessly made a false statement. It does so by adding to the Bill

"(b) a person acting at the tenant's instigation",

without making it clear who is in category (a).

In Lords amendment No. 147, which is for secure tenancies, it is clear that "(a) the tenant, or" should be inserted in the final line of page 63 of the Bill. On first observation, it is not clear whether that is the correct interpretation for Lords amendment No. 122. If that were not correctly interpreted when the Bill was finally put to bed, we could have a nonsense here.

I hope that the Minister will assure us that Lords amendment would change clause 95, which deals with ground 17, so that it would read:

"The tenant is the person, or one of the persons, to whom the tenancy was granted and the landlord was induced to grant the tenancy by a false statement made knowingly or recklessly by the tenant, or

(b) a person acting at the tenant's instigation."

I make that point in the spirit in which we have approached the legislation—of seeking to improve the unsatisfactory parts and not wanting legislation to reach the statute book in a form that could be ambiguous or confusing, thereby creating further problems that would have to be amended at some future date.

Mr. Clappison: I think that ground 17 will become (a) and will deal with the case of the tenant making the sort of representation in question and, as a result of the amendment, (b) will be inserted to cover a third party acting at the tenant's instigation. I must make it clear that the amendment covers a false statement made by (a) the tenant or (b) the third party and that that will be clear when the Bill is printed.

Mr. Raynsford: If the Minister's initial interpretation is correct, there is a problem. If the Bill were to read

"*Ground 17*—(a) The tenant is the person",

as he implied, it would make no sense. The Bill would make sense only if it read

"*Ground 17*—The tenant is the person, or one of the persons, to whom the tenancy was granted and the landlord was induced to grant the tenancy by a false statement made knowingly or recklessly by

(a) the tenant".

If the Minister can confirm that that is the case, we are out of the problem.

Mr. Clappison: That was what I was trying to convey in my original submission. I am sorry that I did not make it sufficiently clear. Those are the two circumstances contemplated by the clause as amended.

Lords amendment agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 123, before clause 98, to insert the following new clause—*Low rent test: nil rateable values*—

".—(1) In section 4(1) of the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 (meaning of "low rent")—

(a) in paragraph (i) (cases where rent limit of two-thirds of rateable value on later of appropriate day and first day of term applies), for the words from "or (where" to "that date" there shall be substituted ", or on or after 1st April 1990 in pursuance of a contract made before that date, and the property had a rateable value other than nil at the date of the commencement of the tenancy or else at any time before 1st April 1990,".

(b) in paragraph (ii) (other cases), for the words from "is entered" to "1990)," there shall be substituted "does not fall within paragraph (i) above,", and

(c) in paragraph (a) (definition of "appropriate day" by reference to section 25(3) of the Rent Act 1977), there shall be inserted at the end "if the reference in paragraph (a) of that provision to a rateable value were to a rateable value other than nil".

(2) In section 4A of the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 (alternative rent limits for the purposes of section 1A(2) of that Act)—

(a) in subsection (1)(b) (cases where rent limit of two-thirds of rateable value on the relevant date applies), for sub-paragraph (ii) there shall be substituted—

"(ii) the property had a rateable value other than nil at the date of commencement of the tenancy or else at any time before 1st April 1990,", and

(b) in subsection (2), for paragraph (b) there shall be substituted—

"(b) "the relevant date" means the date of the commencement of the tenancy or, if the property did not have a rateable value, or had a rateable value of nil, on that date, the date on which it first had a rateable value other than nil;".

(3) In section 8 of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 (leases at a low rent)—

(a) in subsection (1)(b) (cases where rent limit of two-thirds of rateable value on the appropriate date applies), for sub-paragraph (ii) there shall be substituted—

"(ii) the flat had a rateable value other than nil at the date of the commencement of the lease or else at any time before 1st April 1990,", and

(b) in subsection (2), for paragraph (b) there shall be substituted—

"(b) "the appropriate date" means the date of commencement of the lease or, if the flat in question did not have a rateable value, or had a rateable value of nil, on that date, the date on which the flat first had a rateable value other than nil;"."

Mr. Clappison: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 124, 125 and 128, Lords amendment No. 288 and amendment (a) thereto, Lords amendment No. 289 and amendment (a) thereto, Lords amendment No. 290 and amendment (a) thereto, Lords amendments Nos. 291 and 292, Lords amendment No. 293 and amendment (a) thereto, Lords amendment No. 294 and amendment (a) thereto, and Lords amendment No. 295 and amendment (a) thereto.

Mr. Clappison: We now come to the subject of leasehold enfranchisement, including the subject of the low-rent test, which will be familiar to hon. Members in the Chamber who were members of the Standing Committee. I can deal briefly with amendments Nos. 123 to 125, 128, 291 and 292, because they deal with some minor issues relating to leasehold enfranchisements. In particular, it will now be possible for owners of leases with nil rateable values to enfranchise.

I now move on to amendments Nos. 288 to 290 and 293 to 295. The House will recall that, on Report, we abolished the low-rent test for leases over 50 years. We made it clear that we were prepared to be flexible on this figure. We have been persuaded that 35 years would be a more appropriate figure, and we were pleased to accept Opposition amendments tabled in another place by a former distinguished Member of this House to that effect. As a result, we have reactivated the ability of landlords to promote estate management schemes where their properties are newly enfranchiseable.

The other measures in this group are an anti-avoidance device for the rural exemption to the low-rent test, and a transfer of the jurisdiction to rule on the reasonableness of costs for enfranchisement cases under the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 from the court to the leasehold valuation tribunal.

Turning to the background to the low-rent test, throughout our debates the Government have maintained a consistent and principled approach. Let me briefly remind hon. Members why we are seeking to maintain a test of this kind. The policy has been to give enfranchisement rights to those leaseholders who might be regarded as owner-occupiers. This is the broad policy behind the Bill, the 1967 legislation introduced by a Labour Government, and the more recent Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993.

In order to establish whether the leaseholder is an owner-occupier, two tests have been used. First, there must be a long lease—generally more than 21 years. Secondly, the tenant must pay only a nominal ground rent, rather than a market rent. If those two conditions are satisfied, then, except during the final years of the lease, the tenant is likely to have a greater financial stake in the property than the landlord. The hon. Member for Greenwich, with his knowledge of these matters, will be familiar with what I am saying, but the 1967 Act also used as the test a long lease at a low rent.

So, for a long time, there has been a low-rent test. The form differs slightly according to the circumstances, but generally it requires that the rent should be less than two thirds of the rateable value of the property. The purpose of the test is, as I have said, to distinguish between owner-occupier tenants and renting tenants.

There has been pressure to amend or remove the low-rent test. I think that this was not so much because it was thought that renting tenants should be given enfranchisement rights, but because in practice the low-rent test has given rise to difficulties. There are leases where the rent is technically above the low rent limit, but is nevertheless closer to being a nominal ground rent than a full rack rent. In some cases, this has arisen by chance, perhaps because properties were not revalued for rating purposes between 1973 and the end of the rating system in 1990, while ground rents crept up slightly in line with inflation. In other cases, some landlords may have intentionally set rents a small amount above the limit to which I have referred.

[Mr. Clappison]

The Government have accepted that there is a case for reform. As I have already said, we introduced an amendment on Report in this House which would abolish the low-rem test for leases in excess of 50 years, and, following the debate in another place, we have reduced that period to 35 years.

I have to concede that there are no overwhelmingly strong grounds for 35 years, although it is perhaps important—before the hon. Member for Greenwich gets carried away—that eminent members of the valuation profession have said that this is a significant point at which the freehold value rises to about one third of the total interest in the property. I remind the hon. Gentleman that an Opposition Member of the other place tabled an amendment to introduce a period of 35 years. Therefore, that was the time limit lighted upon by a member of the hon. Gentleman's party. That is the background to the 35 years.

We believe that there should be a range of lease lengths—it is now becoming quite a short range, comprising leases of between 21 and 35 years—for which the low-rent test should be retained. I am concerned that there are some leases within this range which are at rack rents, and hence the tenant's stake in them has never been anywhere near so significant as the landlord's. Some landlords wish to let properties on renting tenancies, but equally wish to give the tenant a substantial period of security—for example, in return for the tenant taking on the maintenance and repairing obligations.

We need to recognise that we have responsibilities to both sides, and we need to have regard to equity in the matter. The Government therefore believe that the 35-year rule should be maintained. The vast majority of leases are for more than 35 years. The position for the handful of leases under 35 years is that the low-rent test, which already exists, continues to apply to long leases. That test requires that the lease must be set at a nominal ground rent for enfranchisement to proceed. Only leases of less than 35 years and which are let at rack rents will be excluded.

I hope that the House agrees that we have taken a reasoned and flexible approach, but one which has sought to create equity in a general sense between the two interests. We feel that we have made a compromise at an appropriate point, and we hope that the House will be able to support the Lords amendment and to disagree with the amendments tabled by the Opposition.

Mr. Raynsford: The subject of the low-rent test and the history of what has happened in the past six months as the Bill has progressed through the House is extraordinarily revealing of the Government's attitude to leasehold reform. One could not have a clearer indication of their response. It has not involved, as the Minister claimed, a consistent and principled approach. The Government's approach has been inconsistent and unprincipled. I shall now reveal exactly why.

When we considered the matter in Committee, the Opposition successfully moved an amendment, with the support of the hon. Member for North–West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby), to abolish the low-rent test. The Government opposed the amendment. They were opposed to any change in the existing low-rent test. They were defeated. When the Bill came to the House on Report, the Government did not accept that defeat. They sought to reinstate a low-rent test, but with a 50-year limitation. They argued that that was an appropriate cut-off point—that 50 years was the right period below which the low-rent test should apply but above which it might not apply.

The Government just managed to get away with reinstating the low-rent test, with a narrow majority—two votes. The amendment would not have been defeated if Conservative Members who pledged their support to leaseholders had joined us in the Division Lobby. Only the hon. Member for Bolton, North–East (Mr. Thurnham), an independent-minded Member of Parliament in every respect, joined us.

Other Conservative Members, including the hon. Member for North–West Leicestershire, who supported us in Committee, did not support us on Report, so the abolition of the low-rent test sadly was not carried on that occasion, and the Government got away with introducing a 50-year limitation. However, it was pointed out that the 50-year limitation was arbitrary. There was no logic behind it or any particular reason for it, and it created anomalies. We highlighted some of those anomalies and drew attention to people who would suffer as a result of that 50-year cut-off.

So what has happened? The Government, faced with that argument, have made a further modest retreat. They were not prepared to do the decent thing and accept that the low-rent test should be abolished altogether. They have reduced the period during which the low-rent test will apply from 50 to 35 years. Hon. Members heard the Minister say this evening that there was no particularly good reason for 35 years rather than any other figure. We have once again an arbitrary figure.

The Minister prayed in aid some specious evidence about some valuers who said that perhaps a period was appropriate in which the leasehold interest began to reduce significantly as against the freehold interest. To persuade us of that, the Minister must produce convincing evidence that the cut-off point is precisely 35 years rather than 33, 34 or 36 years. Some pretty clever statistics will be needed to convince us that the balance between the leaseholder's and the freeholder's interest magically transforms at 35 years.

The 35 years is yet another arbitrary figure plucked out of the air by a Government who do not have the courage of their convictions to support leaseholders, because they are in hock to the big landowners. That is why we still have a low-rent test. As soon as the Committee had abolished the low-rent test, all the landed interests came flooding into the Department of the Environment, throwing their hands up in horror and saying, "This will be disastrous. This will ruin us. It will destroy the great landed estates"—and probably saying, although I cannot prove it, "And you won't get your donations to the Conservative party any more if you don't do what we want and reinstate some type of low-rent test."

7 pm

As a result of that pressure from the big landowners, the Government embarked on the absurd process of trying to put back a low-rent test for a shorter period, without consistency, principle or logic. Effectively, it has been a retreat under pressure, carried out with little grace, and with a final product that is far from satisfactory.

The House should consider why a low-rent test was necessary in the first place. The Minister said, and I am the first to acknowledge, that a low-rent test was introduced by the Labour Government in 1967 when they introduced leasehold enfranchisement for houses, and I would argue that, at that time, a low-rent test was entirely appropriate and proper.

The private rented market then was different from that today. There was detailed and rigorous rent control. Landlords were unable to let on a tenancy giving a rack rent, because they were subject to stringent rent controls, with rents set by rent officers under the provision introduced by the Labour Government in the early 1960s. A landlord who wanted to obtain a larger return often resorted to the device of a lease—notionally a lease—of 12 or 15 years, perhaps longer, to ensure a return that could not have been secured by letting the property on a regulated tenancy.

In that framework, the lease was used as a device to get around rent control. To distinguish between a property that was let as a tenanted property and one that was truly a leased property for which the leaseholder had paid a substantial premium to acquire as their home, the low-rent test was understandable and justifiable.

The Minister knows that the world has changed. The private rented market has been deregulated. No new regulated tenancies are being created. The framework of assured shorthold tenancies and assured tenancies allows landlords to let, at a rack rent if they want to do so, without risk. There is no longer a need to distinguish between a straightforward tenancy of that nature and a leasehold property where the lease has been granted on a premium. That is why a low-rent test was necessary in 1967 but is unnecessary today.

The overwhelming consensus in the property industry is that 21 years is the proper period to use to distinguish a lease, in the sense in which we all understand it, from a tenancy. People recognise that cut-off point as the borderline between the two.

That is why, in our amendment, we are substituting 21 for 35. There is a logic behind 21 years. It is widely understood that that is the distinction between leasing and tenancy, whereas there is no such justification for the 35-year figure. Our amendment is consistent and logical. It ensures the proper abolition of the low-rent test, without creating the anomalies that have existed to date and which, sadly, will continue if the Government amendments are adopted.

The low-rent test is no longer needed, and should be abolished. Any Government who had the courage of their convictions and were able to stand up to the big landowners and their vested interests, any Government approaching this in a principled and consistent way, as the Minister claimed to do, would agree with the Opposition that the low-rent test should be abolished, and would therefore agree that 21 years is the appropriate figure to use to distinguish a tenancy from a leasehold.

Mr. Clappison: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall make three brief points.

First, I was not impressed by the explanation offered by the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) for the failure of the 1964 and 1970 Labour Governments in this area. In fact, their enfranchisement proposals were restricted to houses, and did not apply to flats. The hon. Gentleman talks about rent regulation. He is aware that that applies to shorter tenancies, not to the leases to which we are referring, and that leaseholders had no opportunity to enfranchise in those periods of Labour Government.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman chastises us for choosing a fixed time limit, and then recommends a fixed time limit—one of 21 years rather than 35 years. That time limit was proposed in an Opposition amendment in another place. The Opposition in another place may have been seduced by the sort of complaints that the hon. Gentleman envisages coming from the great propertied classes.

Thirdly, that is hardly consistent, which is one of the hon. Gentleman's familiar complaints, with the fact that we were at first prepared to introduce a test of 50 years, and then said that we were prepared to be flexible and reduced it to 35. No doubt we have done so over the massed ranks of bodies of the landed estates, the aristocracy and the great landed interests, but only the hon. Gentleman appears to have noticed that.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 124 and 125 agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 126, after clause 105, to insert the following new clause—*Compensation for postponement of termination in connection with ineffective claims—*

". Schedule (*Compensation for postponement of termination in connection with ineffective claims*) (which makes, in relation to claims to enfranchisement or an extended lease under Part I of the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 and claims to collective enfranchisement or a new lease under Chapter I or II of Part I of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993, provision for compensation of the landlord where the claim has prolonged an existing tenancy, but is ineffective) shall have effect."

Mr. Clappison: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendment No. 296.

Mr. Clappison: These amendments allow landlords to claim compensation for the market rent forgone when an unsuccessful claim for enfranchisement or a new lease is made during the last two years of the original lease term, and results in the leaseholder holding over their ground rent. This provision will come into force on 15 January 1999.

Mr. Raynsford: This is another amendment that serves the landlord's interest.

A short course of study of the history of leasehold reform would be advisable before the Minister makes further remarks in the House about the merits of the Leasehold Reform Act 1967. Anyone who has studied leasehold reform knows that that was by far the most effective piece of leasehold reform legislation that has been passed since the war. It resulted in hundreds of thousands of leaseholders being able to buy the freehold of their homes. That was a successful piece of leasehold reform.

All the present Government's measures attempting to bring justice to leaseholders have failed. The Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987

[Mr. Raynsford]

and the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 have all been seen to fail, because the Government surrendered the principle of support for leaseholders to their financial interest because they are bankrolled by the big landowners. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that they are supporting an amendment that will allow compensation to landowners, which I am sure is dear to the hearts of landowners and dear to the heart of the Government.

We will continue to press for the interests of leaseholders, and, after the next election, when a Labour Government have once again been returned to this country, Labour will prepare a proper and comprehensive measure of leasehold reform, to ensure that leaseholders at long last get a measure to parallel the achievements of the 1967 Act, which achieved very great things for leaseholders in houses. It will be the next Labour Government's historic duty and responsibility to ensure that leaseholders in flats achieve a similar benefit.

Lords amendment agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 127, after clause 105, to insert the following new clause—*Priority of interests on grant of new lease—*

". After section 58 of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 there shall be inserted—

"Priority of interests on grant of new lease.

58A.—(1) Where a lease granted under section 56 takes effect subject to two or more interests to which the existing lease was subject immediately before its surrender, the interests shall have the same priority in relation to one another on the grant of the new lease as they had immediately before the surrender of the existing lease.

(2) Subsection (1) is subject to agreement to the contrary.

(3) Where a person who is entitled on the grant of a lease under section 56 to rights of occupation in relation to the flat comprised in that lease was entitled immediately before the surrender of the existing lease to rights of occupation in relation to the flat comprised in that lease, the rights to which he is entitled on the grant of the new lease shall be treated as a continuation of the rights to which he was entitled immediately before the surrender of the existing lease.

(4) In this section—

"the existing lease", in relation to a lease granted under section 56, means the lease surrendered on the grant of the new lease, and

"rights of occupation" has the same meaning as in the Matrimonial Homes Act 1983."

Mr. Clappison: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment clarifies the position when a leaseholder is granted a renewed lease under the provisions of part I of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993; the charges that applied to the old lease will apply equally to the new one, and with the same priority of interest.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 128 and 129 agreed to.

Clause 110

INTRODUCTORY TENANCIES

Lords amendment: No. 130, in page 72, line 13, leave out ("have been") and insert ("be")

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 131, 132, 141 and 301.

Mr. Curry: This a tidying-up measure, designed to ensure that introductory tenants cannot become secure tenants through default by quitting their tenancies during the introductory period and then returning; or cannot assign their premises to someone and thus endow that other person with a secure tenancy. I believe that the measure commands a consensus.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 131 and 132 agreed to.

Clause 114

NOTICE OF PROCEEDINGS FOR POSSESSION

Lords amendment: No. 133, in page 73, line 44, leave out from

("section") to end of line 45

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 134 to 137.

Mr. Curry: Some concern was expressed in Committee to the effect that the introductory tenancies internal review might not be as objective or fair as people wanted. We were pressed to give the Secretary of State the power to make regulations that laid down basic guidance to that end. The amendment provides for that. It gives the Secretary of State the power to make regulations that can lay down requirements for the conduct of the internal review.

Mr. Raynsford: The Opposition support amendments Nos. 135 and 136, which are to do with tenants being informed of their rights to request a review. The Minister has referred to provisions that will ensure that such a review is carried out fairly and properly.

The idea of introductory tenancies is attractive to some local authorities—but only to some. Others strongly oppose it. The Government have nevertheless proceeded with the idea, so it is clearly right to introduce safeguards against possible abuse.

Introductory tenancies deny the usual principle of security of tenure to council tenants and enable tenancies to be terminated rapidly if the local authority chooses to do so during the introductory period. Hence it is essential that there be safeguards, because the potential for abuse remains.

There is widespread concern about people who may display characteristics that are not necessarily attractive or likely to make them popular in a particular area.

They might fall foul of the provisions if they were granted a tenancy in such an area. One thinks of people housed under the care in the community provisions, who may be a cause of some concern to residents. One thinks, too, of people from ethnic minorities, who may be the subject of crude prejudice or racism.

If trumped-up complaints were lodged against such people by a majority of tenants in an area who did not want someone with a history of mental illness or with a black face to live there, there would be a real risk of injustice without a proper system of safeguards. That is why we pressed strongly in Committee for adequate time for people to dispute possession actions taken against them. They must have a proper opportunity to have their cases reviewed; such a review should be carried out fairly and reasonably, thus guaranteeing justice.

We therefore welcome the amendments, which provide the security that we think essential if the introductory tenancy concept is to come in without the risk of discrimination or breaches of natural justice.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 134 to 141 agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 142, after clause 123, to insert the following new clause—*Jurisdiction of county court—*

".—(1) A county court has jurisdiction to determine questions arising under this Chapter and to entertain proceedings brought under this Chapter and claims, for whatever amount, in connection with an introductory tenancy.

(2) That jurisdiction includes jurisdiction to entertain proceedings as to whether a statement supplied in pursuance of section 122(2)(b) (written statement of certain terms of tenancy) is accurate notwithstanding that no other relief is sought than a declaration.

(3) If a person takes proceedings in the High Court which, by virtue of this section, he could have taken in the county court, he is not entitled to recover any costs.

(4) The Lord Chancellor may make such rules and give such directions as he thinks fit for the purpose of giving effect to this section.

(5) The rules and directions may provide—

(a) for the exercise by a district judge of a county court of any jurisdiction exercisable under this section, and

(b) for the conduct of proceedings in private.

(6) The power to make rules is exercisable by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament."

7.15 pm

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 143 to 146, 179, 180, 244, 245, 300 and 305.

Mr. Curry: These are purely technical amendments. No issue of principle or policy is involved—those two being, of course, indivisible.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 143 to 147 agreed to.

Clause 130

PROCEEDINGS FOR POSSESSION OR TERMINATION

Lords amendment: No. 148, in page 80, line 3, at end insert

("or for the termination of the tenancy, and")

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 149 to 156.

Mr. Curry: These are technical amendments. They concern the notice served on tenants by their landlords to obtain possession. They tidy up current provisions and ensure consistency with the notice provisions in the Housing Acts of 1985 and 1988.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 149 to 156 agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 157, before clause 135, to insert the following new clause—*Power to grant injunctions against anti-social behaviour—*

".—(1) The High Court or a county court may, on an application by a local authority, grant an injunction prohibiting a person from—

(a) engaging in or threatening to engage in conduct causing or likely to cause a nuisance or annoyance to a person residing in, visiting or otherwise engaging in a lawful activity in residential premises to which this section applies or in the locality of such premises,

(b) using or threatening to use residential premises to which this section applies for immoral or illegal purposes, or

(c) entering residential premises to which this section applies or being found in the locality of any such premises.

(2) This section applies to residential premises of the following descriptions—

(a) dwelling-houses held under secure or introductory tenancies from the local authority;

(b) accommodation provided by that authority under Part VII of this Act or Part III of the Housing Act 1985 (homelessness).

(3) The court shall not grant an injunction under this section unless it is of the opinion that—

(a) the respondent has used or threatened to use violence against any person of a description mentioned in subsection (1)(a), and

(b) there is a significant risk of harm to that person or a person of a similar description if the injunction is not granted.

(4) An injunction under this section may—

(a) in the case of an injunction under subsection (1)(a) or (b), relate to particular acts or to conduct, or types of conduct, in general or to both, and

(b) in the case of an injunction under subsection (1)(c), relate to particular premises or a particular locality;

and may be made for a specified period or until varied or discharged.

(5) An injunction under this section may be varied or discharged by the court on an application by—

(a) the respondent, or

(b) the local authority which made the original application.

(6) The court may attach a power of arrest to one or more of the provisions of an injunction which it intends to grant under this section.

(7) The court may, in any case where it considers that it is just and convenient to do so, grant an injunction under this section, or vary such an injunction, even though the respondent has not been given such notice of the proceedings as would otherwise be required by rules of court.

If the court does so, it must afford the respondent an opportunity to make representations relating to the injunction or variation as soon as just and convenient at a hearing of which notice has been given to all the parties in accordance with rules of court.

(8) In this section "local authority" has the same meaning as in the Housing Act 1985."

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 158 to 165 and 302.

Mr. Curry: In Committee in another place, an amendment was tabled to clarify the ability of councils to use section 222 of the Local Government Act 1972 to curb anti-social behaviour. It transpired that some local authorities using that section had obtained legal advice that they would be unwise to rely on the power to restrain anti-social behaviour in premises that they owned, on the ground that there might not be sufficient public interest to justify its use.

It was clear that local authorities harboured some doubts about whether section 222 enabled them to deal with the problem—hence this amendment. The new clause contains an express power to allow councils to obtain an injunction, in the High Court or the county court, to restrain anyone from engaging in anti-social behaviour on council estates. The power is supplemented by a power for the local authority to request a court to attach a power of arrest. That will enable councils to take effective action.

The amendments will be welcomed by local authorities and by the House. The problem of anti-social behaviour is important, and there is broad agreement on the need to find effective ways to deal with it. I hope that this measure will reinforce the available powers.

Mr. Raynsford: Anti-social behaviour is one of the biggest problems facing communities throughout Britain. The problem must be dealt with urgently, and requires serious attention from everyone concerned, whether in central Government or in local government. We need to ensure that local authorities have effective powers to counter the behaviour of a minority of people who cause disproportionate grief and misery to the communities in which they live. The behaviour is often shocking, involving wanton destruction, vandalism and abuse of neighbours—behaviour that is totally incompatible with the normal decencies of human life. Sadly, many local authorities have found it difficult to take effective action against the perpetrators of such behaviour because of the inadequacy of existing legal sanctions and the extraordinary time it often takes to get cases to court and to get appropriate remedies through the courts.

For that reason, in Committee, the Opposition moved a series of amendments that were designed to give local authorities far greater powers to take action against unruly, disorderly and anti-social elements who terrorise their neighbours, and who make communities hellholes in which it is difficult to lead a normal life. Our proposals envisaged, among other measures, injunctions with the power of arrest, so that a local authority could take effective action against an individual who was causing trouble, without necessarily demonstrating that that person, against whom they had powers to act, was a tenant in the region.

We therefore welcome Lords amendment No. 157, which gives effect to the measures that we were advocating. It gives a local authority the power to seek an injunction against people who are responsible for anti-social behaviour. It enables that injunction to be granted with a power of arrest, so that, if an individual against whom the injunction has been granted subsequently acts in a way that causes anxiety, fear or grief to their community, the authority can seek immediate redress, which is a far more effective deterrent than most.

It is not the whole solution, because other measures are needed to ensure effective action against anti-social behaviour. The long period that it takes to get cases into court requires urgent attention. The difficulties that people encounter because of the reluctance of certain witnesses to come forward because of fear of intimidation and reprisal is another issue. In addition to this amendment, other actions can give greater safety and security to communities.

In government, we will pursue a comprehensive range of measures to bring redress to communities, and to ensure that there is proper sanction against people who make their neighbours' lives a misery and that communities can live in peace and confidence without the fear of their lives being devastated by the actions of a small anti-social minority. Having said that, however, the amendment goes a significant way towards that goal. It gives additional powers. We are delighted that the Government have agreed to our proposals to achieve that, and we therefore warmly endorse the amendment and look forward to its reaching the statute book.

Mrs. Maddock: The amendment is welcomed by all sides, all parties and local authorities, not least because anti-social behaviour has been a great problem. During the passage of the Bill, we have had many discussions on the best way to do it, and giving local authorities the ability to use injunctions against people who behave badly has been the one issue on which there has been agreement. As has been pointed out, however, this applies only to local authority accommodation, and there are problems, particularly on mixed estates. We should be considering, and should have considered, other measures.

We had interesting discussions after the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) made some interesting proposals which seemed to me, and I think to others, to go a little beyond the mark in giving local authorities the ability to deal with people without their having to be proved guilty. That struck some of us as going a little too far, but, as he has said, all of us agree that injunctions are valuable. We must, however, recognise that, even if a person can get an injunction, he cannot always get things moving through the courts as quickly as he would like. We will probably have to return to this issue, but, as the hon. Gentleman and others have said, this is a welcome first step. I hope that it will be kept under review and that

the Minister will consider whether other proposals can be made to ensure that it works in the way that he and I hope it will.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 158 to 165 agreed to.

Clause 142

ALLOCATION OF HOUSING ACCOMMODATION

Lords amendment: No. 166, in page 88, line 40, at end insert ("section 144(1A) or")

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 169 to 173, 190 to 197, 303, 323, 325 and 326.

Mr. Curry: We now move to the parts of the Bill reconciling welfare provisions under homelessness with social security provisions as they relate to asylum seekers.

The Government's policy is that no one who is here temporarily or illegally or who is seeking asylum is entitled to housing through the housing register. The same groups are not entitled to homelessness assistance, with the exception of people seeking asylum at the port of entry, who are entitled to homelessness assistance up to the first decision by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

The Court of Appeal found against my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security on the ground that he exceeded his powers. The amendments are designed to structure primary legislation to avoid the risk of successful legal challenge in respect of housing legislation. In effect, the prohibitions will apply unless the Secretary of State specifies otherwise by regulation on, for example, people with settled immigration status and people who have been granted refugee status or exceptional leave. The regulations will be made ahead of commencement, so this is a reconciliation measure to ensure that the Bill's provisions equate to the provisions in parallel legislation. I therefore commend the Lords amendments to the House.

Mr. Raynsford: This group of amendments is a shabby illustration of the Government's continued vendetta against asylum seekers—a vendetta which has brought considerable shame on this country internationally and has tarnished our reputation, acquired over 300 years, for being fair and willing to accept people who have suffered torture and discrimination in other countries, and who have been able to seek refuge here. Now we can no longer hold our heads up high in the international community as a country that is willing to welcome people who have suffered appalling torture in other countries.

A week ago tonight, I was speaking about one such person who had come to this country after suffering grotesquely at the hands of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. That person, simply because he arrived in London late at night, confused and frightened, and did not speak any English, failed to make his application for asylum at the port of entry. Because of that, had he applied after 5 February, he would have been treated as a bogus asylum seeker, and would have been denied benefits and entitlement to any social security assistance or housing. That is a comment on the Government's extraordinarily crude, vindictive and unpleasant values in denying to people who have suffered appallingly elsewhere an opportunity to enter this country, and to be welcomed and helped to establish themselves again on a reasonable footing.

7.30 pm

Previous generations of refugees—from Nazi Germany, the pogroms in Russia and eastern Europe in the 19th century, and even before that from the repression in France against the Huguenots at the time of Louis XIV—were welcomed in Britain. Refugees of today, even if they come from vile regimes like that in Iraq, will be treated in the shabby way that the Government seek to introduce.

In his brief speech, the Minister referred to the Government's defeat in the courts as a result of the implementation of their changed rules affecting asylum seekers. Rather than proposing amendments to the law to overturn the policies that caused those defeats—policies described as draconian in impact—the Government have responded simply by seeking to legitimise the policy that they previously sought to adopt. The amendment is part of that shabby process.

Quite apart from that wider policy background, there are serious reasons for reconsidering the amendment. While asylum seekers who arrive in this country wait for the Home Office to reach a decision on their application for asylum, they cannot register on a housing waiting list. Many must wait for three years or more because of the Home Office's extraordinary inefficiency in processing asylum cases.

In areas where people earn additional points for the time they have been on a waiting list, those individuals will be denied the opportunity to obtain points because they will have been ineligible to register on the waiting list. Although at the end of the process, perhaps three years on, the Home Office may grant them asylum and they will therefore become eligible to go on a waiting list, by the very nature of these restrictions, which will be enforced by the amendment, their chance of being rehoused will be put back by that wait. It will not be the asylum seekers' fault but the fault of the Government, because of their slow processing of asylum cases.

It cannot be right to hit people twice with the double whammy of, first, denying them the opportunity to be considered for housing when they arrive in the country as refugees and, secondly, making them suffer an additional penalty because of the Home Office's failure to process their case expeditiously. I hope that the Government will think again. I fear that they will not. No one can be proud of this chapter in the history of this country's policy towards asylum seekers. It will be frequently recalled in future years as evidence of the Government's inhumanity and political ineptness.

Mrs. Maddock: This is one of the most mean-spirited parts of the Bill. Outside the House there has been incredible lobbying to get the Government to change their minds and ensure that people who flee terrible regimes are dealt with fairly when they arrive on our shores.

There has been widespread support from the Church. It is galling to hear the Government say that we need moral guidance from the Church, yet when the Church gives the Government moral guidance, they choose to ignore it.

[Mrs. Maddock]

We have already heard of the case of people who arrive at a port of entry speaking not a word of English, perhaps having fled from torture and dreadful conditions with their children and family. If they do not do the right thing at the right time, they are penalised for ever more.

This matter has been debated widely and has had a lot of press coverage. It is sad that, at the Bill's final stages, the Government have still not listened. They could at least have promised that they would ensure that the procedures for dealing with people who managed to have their case heard were dealt with quickly. That would have done far more to alleviate the problems of illegal immigrants than this mean-spirited measure. I feel extremely sad about this. The Minister responsible for the Bill is not mean-spirited, and it is unfortunate that he could not persuade his colleagues to do something better.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 167 to 173 agreed to.

Clause 145

THE HOUSING REGISTER

Lords amendment: No. 174, in page 90, line 16, after ("it") insert ("and other relevant matters")

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment No. 176.

Mr. Curry: These two small amendments are intended to improve the provisions about the housing register by ensuring that it is sufficiently comprehensive. Amendment No. 174 will ensure that the register contains information not only about the applicant but about other relevant matters—for example, other members of his or her household and the circumstances in which he or she lives. The information will be confidential because of other provisions in the Bill.

Amendment No. 176 would give an authority the discretion to remove someone from its register if he or she asks it to do so, where he or she is owed a duty by that authority under the homelessness provisions. At the moment, the authorities have no option but to remove him or her. It is sensible to give the housing authority that option, as it would remove abuses—for example, people seeking to remove their name from the register and then making a new application.

The amendments are technical but useful improvements to how the register will work, and I invite the House to agree with them.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 146

OPERATION OF HOUSING REGISTER

Lords amendment: No. 175, in page 90, leave out line 24 and insert—

("( ) When a local housing authority put a person on their housing register (on his application or otherwise), they shall notify him that they have done so.")

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 177, 178 and 217 to 222.

Mr. Curry: These amendments are more substantial, but I think that the House will wish to agree with them. They show my willingness to reflect on points raised in Committee. Having done so, I decided that some of the arguments were substantial and I therefore invited the other place to agree the amendments. I now invite this House to do the same.

Amendments Nos. 217 to 222 extend the right of internal review to allocations. We are ensuring that there is an effective review procedure.

Amendments Nos. 220 to 222 allow an appeal on homelessness decisions, on a point of law, to the county court following an internal review. In Committee, I was pressed to do this, and I reflected on it. A review should be rapid, effective and fair. I concluded that some ultimate recourse to the county court was sensible for people who felt that the law had not been followed accurately. There are 21 days in which to do that, which I understand is the normal period for the county court.

Mr. Raynsford: As the Minister said, the amendments are an improvement on the original provisions of the Bill and we welcome them. If people are refused access to a local authority housing register, that may have a serious impact on their prospects of securing good-quality accommodation, and they must have an opportunity to challenge a decision to deny them access to the register if they believe that the decision has been taken wrongly or on the basis of incorrect information. An opportunity to appeal, both internally and externally, is proper and correct. We pressed for this right and we are pleased that the Government have agreed that it should be incorporated in the Bill. We warmly welcome the amendments.

Mrs. Maddock: I also warmly welcome the amendments. I have only one comment: we had a discussion at the beginning of today's debate about how thick the amendments are—this measure could have been dealt with a long time ago.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 176 to 180 agreed to.

Clause 156

HOMELESSNESS AND THREATENED HOMELESSNESS

Lords amendment: No. 181, in page 93, line 30, leave out ("there is") and insert ("he has")

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 182 to 186.

Mr. Curry: These are drafting amendments to clarify the law.

Mr. Raynsford: I agree with the Minister, but I cannot allow this opportunity to pass without commenting on the obscure processes of legislation. Essentially, the amendment restores to the first clause of the Bill relating to homelessness, a structure similar to the one that was created in 1977 when the Rent Act first reached the statute book. Those who have followed the processes by which the legislation has been attacked by the Government will know that there has been an on-going battle to defend the principles that lay behind the 1977 legislation.

That Act was a positive and appropriate response to the needs of homeless people, and it provided a framework that has worked well for 18 years. It has ensured that a large number of people have had accommodation—they would have been homeless without it. It is a tragedy that the Government have continued to pursue their vendetta against the homeless by seeking to undermine the provisions of the 1977 legislation.

The only consolation is that, over the past six months or so, we have been able to mitigate, to a modest extent, some of the damage that has been done by the Government. What I find curious about this group of amendments is, as I have already said, that we are now returning to a format similar to the one that was originally proposed in 1977. The legislation starts with a definition of "homelessness" and includes other categories of people who have accommodation but who cannot secure entry to it or who cannot reside in it because of constraints, such as those identified in amendment No. 182.

7.45 pm

Many hon. Members believe that the 1977 legislation should have been left unamended—other than a clarification to ensure that it was interpreted in the way that was originally intended—to guarantee that homeless people receive help in the form of secure accommodation. An element of doubt was cast on that by a judgment in the High Court a year ago. Apart from the need for clarification—to reinstate the original intention of the 1977 legislation—there was absolutely no need to tinker with the legislation, and it is a tragedy that the Government have chosen to do so.

This tragedy will affect the lives of many people. The only consolation that we have is the knowledge that the Government's shortsightedness in undermining the homeless legislation is matched only by their short life expectancy. The next Government—a Labour Government—will reinstate a proper framework of responsibility for the relief of homelessness. The Labour party will ensure that the original intentions of the 1977 legislation are put back on the statute book. Homeless people will have a guarantee of a proper legal framework of responsibilities backed by law to ensure that they are not deserted in their hour of need.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North–East): I ask the Minister to clarify how these amendments will help the homeless, given the number of boarded-up council houses throughout country, particularly in my constituency. I wrote to the Minister last December about the problem of boarded-up council houses in my constituency, and I received a reply from the Under–Secretary on 11 January that assured me that forthcoming legislation would help to meet the problem.

I see absolutely no reason for council houses to be boarded up. It is a tragedy of incompetence. It is no good for housing the homeless; it is no good for the neighbours of the empty houses, who have to put up with the mess, inconvenience and vandalism that can occur; and it is no good for council tax payers, who should be able to look to earnings from valuable assets instead of the liabilities of leaving the properties empty.

I assure my hon. Friend the Minister that the problem still persists in my constituency. On Friday, I visited Beechcroft grove—I would like the Minister to visit Beechcroft grove. From its name, one would think that it is a pleasant, leafy suburban street. Sadly, when I stood in Beechcroft grove I felt as if I was in Beirut, not in Britain. There are 37 houses, 21 of which are empty and boarded up. What confidence can anyone have in a council that persists in such a dereliction? By coincidence, on the day of my visit, three vans arrived with workmen from the council to start cleaning up the mess in the so-called gardens of the empty properties.

What would my hon. Friend the Minister say to Mr. and Mrs. Harrison, of 27 Beechcroft grove, who have occupied the property for 37 years? It is now surrounded by a desert of derelict properties. Why should they have to pay rent of £1,500 per annum? Would it not be better if they could buy the property under the right-to-buy legislation? It should cost them not much more than £1,500—they should get a full discount on top of the low value of the properties in the area.

I should like the Minister to assure the House that new provisions will provide an opportunity to bring new, caring owners on to such an estate, whether as owner-occupiers or as landlords.

On Friday, I was certainly pleased to visit Beechcroft grove with Mr. John O'Donnell of the North West Landlords Association, who is a good example of a caring landlord, and who certainly would not like to leave his properties empty. Bolton council is for ever pleading poverty, yet there it is with 21 houses that should be worth well over half a million pounds. Presumably those houses are now totally worthless, if not a liability.

I am grateful for the opportunity to mention that issue in the debate. I should be pleased to hear the Minister say that legislation will address the issue and that my constituents Mr. and Mrs. Harrison and their son can look forward to living again in a pleasant Beechcroft grove instead of the derelict mess that it is now.

Mr. Curry: I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North–East (Mr. Thurnham) must look to the other Bill on housing—the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill—for specific legislative help. That Bill will enable local authorities to use renovation grants in a strategic manner in housing renewal areas. That may be the answer to his specific concerns.

Generally, about 2 per cent. of council houses are vacant, and about 1.1 per cent. are management voids and are available. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is crucial that those houses should be brought into use, and the Government are urging on local authorities an empty property strategy. When we do the annual round of housing investment programmes, we always seek to receive from local authorities effective strategies to do the obvious thing—to bring empty properties into use wherever possible.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment Nos. 182 to 186 agreed to.

Clause 157

MEANING OF ACCOMMODATION AVAILABLE FOR OCCUPATION

Lords amendment: No. 187, in page 94, line 11, leave out from ("that") to end of line 13 and insert

("this will lead to domestic violence against him, or against—

(a) a person who normally resides with him as a member of his family, or

(b) any other person who might reasonably be expected to reside with him.

For this purpose "domestic violence", in relation to a person, means violence from a person with whom he is associated, or threats of violence from such a person which are likely to be carried out.")

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 188 and 210.

Mr. Curry: The amendments are concerned with the serious issue of domestic violence. During the Bill's passage, hon. Members from both sides of the House expressed their concerns about that issue. In particular, they wanted to ensure that the Bill deals with cases in which violence could be threatened from people who were no longer living with a partner, but with whom there had been a relationship, and that a tenancy could be terminated on those grounds. We have now extended the Bill's scope to encompass a broader definition of domestic violence.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) was particularly concerned about this issue, as were many of our colleagues who worked on the Bill. I hope that the amendments will address their concerns, and I commend them to the House.

Mr. Raynsford: This is one of the few cases in which an amendment to the Rent Act 1977 was necessary, because the original definition of domestic violence was restricted to violence from some other person living in the property. As the Minister said in his remarks on the amendments, there are circumstances in which people can be subject to domestic violence from a former partner who is no longer resident in the property, or from other people who are not resident there.

Therefore, the changed definition covers violence that might be threatened or perpetrated by a person's associates, who are defined in Lords amendment No. 188. That is a welcome addition to the legislative framework and provides a better basis on which to bring relief to people who are the victims of domestic violence.

The problem is that, once people have been defined as being in a category of those who should be helped, they will not receive the same degree of help that they would have received under the 1977 Act. They may well find that the improvement worked by this group of amendments is entirely illusory because, despite being included in the categories of those to whom assistance should be given, the other changes to the 1977 legislation will nullify that benefit, and they will find that they are consequently no better off.

The amendments are one reason to be happy about changes in the legislation, but it is against a background of negative and destructive changes to the framework for assisting homeless people. If implemented, the changes will cause a great deal of hardship and many problems to homeless people across Britain.

Mrs. Maddock: As a result of the amendments, important clarification of those who will be protected from all forms of domestic violence will be provided. I hope that the Minister will consider the way in which the clauses operate and whether they do what we hope they will. All those who work with women—but also with men—who suffer from domestic violence will welcome the clarification. However, they will be concerned whether, ultimately, there will be accommodation to enable such people to escape the violence.

I hope that the Minister will examine how the provision will work in practice. As with some of the other amendments that we have considered today, he is giving with one hand in one part of the Bill and taking away with another hand in another part of the Bill. I am quite sure that those who work with people fleeing domestic violence will be watching carefully to see whether the provisions accomplish what we want them to, and I hope that the Minister will also be watching.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 188 to 197 agreed to.

Clause 167

INTERIM DUTY TO ACCOMMODATE IN CASE OF APPARENT PRIORITY NEED

Lords amendment: No. 198, in page 98, line 15, leave out subsection (4)

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 199 to 201 and 205 to 209.

Mr. Curry: We tabled this group of amendments in response to concerns expressed in another place that clause 196 could be used by less scrupulous authorities as a get-out. The amendments fulfil a commitment to make it clear in the Bill that the authorities must be satisfied that the advice and assistance that they provide is sufficient to enable the applicant to secure accommodation. Therefore, clause 196 is strengthened by ensuring that the authority cannot simply tell someone to go and find accommodation for himself and then declare that the matter is finished.

The other amendments disapply the alternative accommodation provisions in clause 196 in cases in which only a minor duty is owed to households accepted to be homeless.

The reason for the amendments is a wish to ensure that the provisions apply only in certain limited circumstance. We do not wish local authorities to be required to consider whether suitable alternative accommodation is available in every single case.

Mr. Raynsford: The Minister has described the amendments as designed to cover the possibility that some less scrupulous authorities will seek to evade responsibilities to the homeless by use of the original formulation of the alternative accommodation rule.

I prefer to describe such a provision as the "Wandsworth amendment", and it is necessary to stop that authority from interpreting the provisions in a manner that is hostile to the interests of homeless people.

Although the changes are welcome, they do not go far enough. The alternative accommodation loophole remains open, and authorities can still reach a decision that someone is able to find alternative accommodation—because the wording of Lords amendment No. 208 makes it quite clear that the decision ultimately belongs to authorities. The amendment states:

"their duty is to provide the applicant with such advice and assistance as the authority consider is reasonably required to enable him to secure such accommodation."

That does not effectively close the loophole against Wandsworth or any similar-minded authorities but will allow an authority that does not want to accept its responsibilities to the homeless to refuse to assist them, on the ground that the authority—and only the authority—considers that it is possible for the applicant to find alternative accommodation. That is a dangerous part of the Bill, and if it were to stay on the statute book any length of time, it would allow local authorities to drive a coach and horses through their responsibilities to the homeless.

The only consolation is that the life expectancy of the changes is short—I have already given a clear sign that a Labour Government will restore a proper statutory framework of responsibility to homeless people that all authorities will have to discharge, including those that are reluctant to do so.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 199 to 201 agreed to.

Clause 172

DUTY TO PERSONS WITH PRIORITY NEED WHO ARE NOT HOMELESS INTENTIONALLY

Lords amendment: No. 202, in page 100, line 14, at end insert—

("( ) if the applicant was occupying accommodation made available to him under section (*Duties to applicant whose case is considered for referral or referred*)(3) (interim duty where case considered for referral but not referred), the date on which he was notified under subsection (2) of that section of the decision that the conditions for referral were not met;")

8 pm

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendments Nos. 203, 211 to 216 and 229.

Mr. Curry: These technical amendments will improve connected clauses.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 203 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 204, in page 100, line 38, after ("satisfied") insert

("that the accommodation was suitable for him and")

Mr. Curry: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendments Nos. 223 to 228, 304 and 324.

Mr. Curry: A lot of concern has been expressed about the Bill's provision to place a duty on local authorities for two years, which would be renewable. It was said that such a duty might be difficult to observe in certain areas of housing stress or in respect of persons requiring particular types of property. After much reflection, I decided to meet some of those concerns.

I am aware that a small number of local authorities could have difficulty, so the amendment provides that, if the Secretary of State is satisfied that a local authority cannot manage, he can make a direction applying to it a 12-month derogation in respect of particular properties or persons. The Secretary of State will set the conditions, in liaison with the housing authorities. That welcome flexibility is at peace with that which I have sought to introduce throughout the Bill where a case for it has been made.

Mr. Raynsford: There can be no clearer illustration of the nonsense in this part of the Bill than this group of amendments. Homeless people need permanent accommodation. The statutory framework that has been in place since 1977 rightly put the emphasis on helping homeless people to secure permanent accommodation. The Government are substituting a concept that only the more loony elements in Conservative Central Office, aided by the extreme fringes of right-wing think tanks, could have devised. Homeless people will have to be shoe-horned into temporary accommodation, even though it is unsatisfactory, more expensive and universally recognised as an inappropriate solution. The Government's dogmatic approach means that temporary accommodation must in the first instance be all that is offered to homeless applicants.

As a result, the Minister found himself in an impossible position. He was presented with evidence from a large number of local authorities, which demonstrated that it was far more sensible to put homeless people in their own housing stock, rather than in temporary accommodation—probably at far greater public expense. The Minister's first response was to allow a limited period—one year—in local authority permanent accommodation. When it was pointed out that it would be ridiculous to evict people from council housing at the end of one year, the Government responded by extending the period to two years.

When it was pointed out that a nonsensical situation would still prevail at the end of the second year, the Government came back with the extraordinary provision, in clause 172, of a Lords amendment that states that, although a local authority will not be permitted to house people in permanent accommodation for more than two years in any three, the Secretary of State may, on the application of a local housing authority, allow it discretion to permit homeless persons to remain in permanent accommodation for a further period, provided that it does not exceed one year.

As with the low-rent test changes, the Government are gradually retreating from an absurd position, to one which is slightly less absurd but still achieves any sensible policy

[Mr. Raynsford]

objective. The amendment represents a modest improvement on a previously thoroughly unsatisfactory provision, but we will not oppose it as it makes more feasible the ability of local authorities to house homeless persons in their own permanent accommodation rather than in expensive temporary accommodation.

Mrs. Maddock: Moving homeless people into local authority housing, only to move them out again, is totally ridiculous. We can see how ridiculous, in legislation that gives the Secretary of State power almost to deal with individual properties. That shows how crazy is the measure.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 205 to 245 agreed to.

Clause 203

EXTENT

Lords amendment: No. 246, in page 115, line 5, leave out from ("that") to end of line 10 and insert—

("(a) amendments or repeals of provisions of the Housing Associations Act 1985, other than in consequence of paragraph 1 of Schedule 15 to this Act (repeal of Part IV of the Housing Act 1988), do not extend to Scotland,

(b) amendments or repeals of provisions of the Housing Act 1988 relating to registered housing associations do not extend to Scotland,

(c) amendments or repeals of provisions of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 or the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 do not extend to Scotland or Northern Ireland, and

(d) repeals of the following provisions do not extend to Scotland—

(i) section 24(5)(a) and (c) of the Local Government Act 1988,

(ii) section 182 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989,

(iii) paragraph 21(3) of Schedule 6 to the Charities Act 1993, and

(iv) provisions in Schedule 26 to the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980.")

Mr. Clappison: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 249, 250 and 327.

Mr. Clappison: These are technical amendments and I ask the House to support them.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 204

COMMENCEMENT

Lords amendments Nos. 247 to 250 agreed to.

Schedule 1

REGISTERED SOCIAL LANDLORDS: REGULATION

Lords amendments Nos. 251 to 269 agreed to.

Schedule 2

SOCIAL RENTED SECTOR: HOUSING COMPLAINTS

Lords amendments Nos. 270 and 271 agreed to.

Schedule 3

SOCIAL RENTED SECTOR: MINOR AMENDMENTS

Lords amendments Nos. 272 and 273 agreed to.

Schedule 3

SOCIAL RENTED SECTOR: MINOR AMENDMENTS

Lords amendment: No. 274, in page 136, leave out lines 42 to 49 and insert—

("Realisation of value of Corporation's loans portfolio.

76A.—(1) The Corporation may, and if so directed by the Secretary of State (under section 76) shall, enter into arrangements of a description approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of realising the value of the whole or part of its loans portfolio.

(2) The arrangements may provide for—

(a) the transfer of any estate or interest of the Corporation, or

(b) the creation or disposal of economic interests not involving a transfer of an estate or interest,

and may extend to such incidental or ancillary matters as the Corporation or the Secretary of State considers appropriate.

(3) In this section the Corporation's "loans portfolio" means the Corporation's rights and obligations in relation to any loans or related securities.

(4) Nothing in the terms of any loan or related transaction entered into by the Corporation shall be construed as impliedly prohibiting or restricting the Corporation from dealing with its loans portfolio in accordance with arrangements under this section.".)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Curry.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment No. 276.

Mr. Raynsford: This amendment might be described as the one that sells off the family silver. It is concerned with the disposal of the Housing Corporation's loans portfolio. I rise only to draw attention to widely held fears in the housing world that there will be yet further cuts in the budget for housing association investment in the coming year.

The Government have cut the Housing Corporation's budget in each of the last two years by some £300 million on each occasion, causing enormous damage to the investment programmes of hundreds of housing associations and reducing dramatically the numbers of homes being produced for people in need. If there were to be a further cut in the Housing Corporation's budget in the coming year, that would do even more damage to an already woefully depleted housing programme.

At a time when the Government are giving themselves powers to dispose of the corporation's loans portfolio, it would be a sensible first application of the funds received to restore the cuts in housing association investment programmes to ensure that, in the years ahead, we can

look forward to an expanding programme of social housing, rather than facing yet further reductions in an already hopelessly inadequate housing programme.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 275 to 277 agreed to. [One with Special Entry.]

Schedule 5

TEXT OF PART II OF THE LANDLORD AND TENANT ACT 1987, AS AMENDED

Lords amendments Nos. 278 to 285 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 286 disagreed to.

Amendments made in lieu of the Lords amendment: (a), in page 144, line 43, leave out from first 'order' to end of line 45 and insert

'subject to this limit, that the fees payable in respect of any one application or reference by the court together with any proceedings before the tribunal arising out of that application or reference shall not exceed £500 or such other amount as may be specified by order of the Secretary of State.'.

(b), in page 145, line 1, leave out 'which, unless the order' and insert—

'( ) No order altering the limit under subsection (3) shall be made unless a draft of the order has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

( ) Any other order under this section, unless it'.—[*Mr. Brandreth.*]

After Schedule 5

Lords amendment: No. 287, after schedule 5, to insert the following new schedule—*("SCHEDULE—*

AMENDMENTS OF PART I OF THE LANDLORD AND TENANT ACT 1987

PART I

RIGHTS OF FIRST REFUSAL

The following sections are substituted for sections 5 to 10 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987—

"Rights of first refusal

LANDLORD REQUIRED TO SERVE OFFER NOTICE ON TENANTS

5.—(1) Where the landlord proposes to make a relevant disposal affecting premises to which this Part applies, he shall serve a notice under this section (an "offer notice") on the qualifying tenants of the flats contained in the premises (the "constituent flats").

(2) An offer notice must comply with the requirements of whichever is applicable of the following sections—

section 5A (requirements in case of contract to be completed by conveyance ,&c.),

section 5B (requirements in case of sale at auction),

section 5C (requirements in case of grant of option or right of pre-emption);

section 5D (requirements in case of conveyance not preceded by contract, &c.);

and in the case of a disposal to which section 5E applies (disposal for non-monetary consideration), shall also comply with the requirements of that section.

(3) Where a landlord proposes to effect a transaction involving the disposal of an estate or interest in more than one building (whether or not involving the same estate or interest), he shall, for the purpose of complying with this section, sever the transaction so as to deal with each building separately.

(4) If, as a result of the offer notice being served on different tenants on different dates, the period specified in the notice as the period for accepting the offer would end on different dates, the notice shall have effect in relation to all the qualifying tenants on whom it is served as if it provided for that period to end with the latest of those dates.

(5) A landlord who has not served an offer notice on all of the qualifying tenants on whom it was required to be served shall nevertheless be treated as having complied with this section—

(a) if he has served an offer notice on not less than 90% of the qualifying tenants on whom such a notice was required to be served, or

(b) where the qualifying tenants on whom it was required to be served number less than ten, if he has served such a notice on all but one of them.

OFFER NOTICE: REQUIREMENTS IN CASE OF CONTRACT TO BE COMPLETED BY CONVEYANCE, &C

5A.—(1) The following requirements must be met in relation to an offer notice where the disposal consists of entering into a contract to create or transfer an estate or interest in land.

(2) The notice must contain particulars of the principal terms of the disposal proposed by the landlord, including in particular—

(a) the property, and the estate or interest in that property, to which the contract relates,

(b) the principal terms of the contract (including the deposit and consideration required).

(3) The notice must state that the notice constitutes an offer by the landlord to enter into a contract on those terms which may be accepted by the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats.

(4) The notice must specify a period within which that offer may be so accepted, being a period of not less than two months which is to begin with the date of service of the notice.

(5) The notice must specify a further period of not less than two months within which a person or persons may be nominated by the tenants under section 6.

(6) This section does not apply to the grant of an option or right of pre-emption (see section 5C).

OFFER NOTICE: REQUIREMENTS IN CASE OF SALE BY AUCTION

5B.—(1) The following requirements must be met in relation to an offer notice where the landlord proposes to make the disposal by means of a sale at a public auction held in England and Wales.

(2) The notice must contain particulars of the principal terms of the disposal proposed by the landlord, including in particular the property to which it relates and the estate or interest in that property proposed to be disposed of.

(3) The notice must state that the disposal is proposed to be made by means of a sale at a public auction.

(4) The notice must state that the notice constitutes an offer by the landlord, which may be accepted by the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats, for the contract (if any) entered into by the landlord at the auction to have effect as if a person or persons nominated by them, and not the purchaser, had entered into it.

(5) The notice must specify a period within which that offer may be so accepted, being a period of not less than two months beginning with the date of service of the notice.

(6) The notice must specify a further period of not less than 28 days within which a person or persons may be nominated by the tenants under section 6.

(7) The notice must be served not less than four months or more than six months before the date of the auction; and—

(a) the period specified in the notice as the period within which the offer may be accepted must end not less than two months before the date of the auction, and

(b) the period specified in the notice as the period within which a person may be nominated under section 6 must end not less than 28 days before the date of the auction.

(8) Unless the time and place of the auction and the name of the auctioneers are stated in the notice, the landlord shall, not less than 28 days before the date of the auction, serve on the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats a further notice stating those particulars.

OFFER NOTICE: REQUIREMENTS IN CASE OF GRANT OR OPTION OR RIGHT OF PRE-EMPTION

5C.—(1) The following requirements must be met in relation to an offer notice where the disposal consists of the grant of an option or right of pre-emption.

(2) The notice must contain particulars of the principal terms of the disposal proposed by the landlord, including in particular—

(a) the property, and the estate or interest in that property, to which the option or right of pre-emption relates,

(b) the consideration required by the landlord for granting the option or right of pre-emption, and

(c) the principal terms on which the option or right of pre-emption would be exercisable, including the consideration payable on its exercise.

(3) The notice must state that the notice constitutes an offer by the landlord to grant an option or right of pre-emption on those terms which may be accepted by the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats.

(4) The notice must specify a period within which that offer may be so accepted, being a period of not less than two months which is to begin with the date of service of the notice.

(5) The notice must specify a further period of not less than two months within which a person or persons may be nominated by the tenants under section 6.

OFFER NOTICE: REQUIREMENTS IN CASE OF CONVEYANCE NOT PRECEDED BY CONTRACT, &C

5D.—(1) The following requirements must be met in relation to an offer notice where the disposal is not made in pursuance of a contract, option or right or pre-emption binding on the landlord.

(2) The notice must contain particulars of the principal terms of the disposal proposed by the landlord, including in particular—

(a) the property to which it relates and the estate or interest in that property proposed to be disposed of, and

(b) the consideration required by the landlord for making the disposal.

(3) The notice must state that the notice constitutes an offer by the landlord to dispose of the property on those terms which may be accepted by the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats.

(4) The notice must specify a period within which that offer may be so accepted, being a period of not less than two months which is to begin with the date of service of the notice.

(5) The notice must specify a further period of not less than two months within which a person or persons may be nominated by the tenants under section 6.

OFFER NOTICE: DISPOSAL FOR NON-MONETARY CONSIDERATION

5E.—(1) This section applies where, in any case to which section 5 applies, the consideration required by the landlord for making the disposal does not consist, or does not wholly consist, of money.

(2) The offer notice, in addition to complying with whichever is applicable of sections 5A to 5D, must state—

(a) that an election may made under section 8C (explaining its effect), and

(b) that, accordingly, the notice also constitutes an offer by the landlord, which may be accepted by the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats, for a person or persons nominated by them to acquire the property in pursuance of sections 11 to 17.

(3) The notice must specify a period within which that offer may be so accepted, being a period of not less than two months which is to begin with the date of service of the notice.

ACCEPTANCE OF LANDLORD'S OFFER: GENERAL PROVISIONS

6.—(1) Where a landlord has served an offer notice, he shall not during—

(a) the period specified in the notice as the period during which the offer may be accepted, or

(b) such longer period as may be agreed between him and the requisite majority of the qualifying tenants of the constituent flats,

dispose of the protected interest except to a person or persons nominated by the tenants under this section.

(2) Where an acceptance notice is duly served on him, he shall not during the protected period (see subsection (4) below) dispose of the protected interest except to a person duly nominated for the purposes of this section by the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats (a "nominated person").

(3) An "acceptance notice" means a notice served on the landlord by the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats informing him that the persons by whom it is served accept the offer contained in his notice.

An acceptance notice is "duly served" if it is served within—

(a) the period specified in the offer notice as the period within which the offer may be accepted, or

(b) such longer period as may be agreed between the landlord and the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats.

(4) The "protected period" is the period beginning with the date of service of the acceptance notice and ending with—

(a) the end of the period specified in the offer notice as the period for nominating a person under this section, or

(b) such later date as may be agreed between the landlord and the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of constituent flats.

(5) A person is "duly nominated" for the purposes of this section if he is nominated within—

(a) the period specified in the offer notice as the period for nomination, or

(b) such longer period as may be agreed between the landlord and the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats.

(6) A person nominated for the purposes of this section by the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats may be replaced by another person so nominated if, and only if, he has (for any reason) ceased to be able to act as a nominated person.

(7) Where two or more persons have been nominated and any of them ceases to act without being replaced, the remaining person or persons so nominated may continue to act.

FAILURE TO ACCEPT LANDLORD'S OFFER OR TO MAKE NOMINATION

7.—(1) Where a landlord has served an offer notice on the qualifying tenants of the constituent flats and—

(a) no acceptance notice is duly served on the landlord, or

(b) no person is nominated for the purposes of section 6 during the protected period,

the landlord may, during the period of 12 months beginning with the end of that period, dispose of the protected interest to such person as he thinks fit, but subject to the following restrictions.

(2) Where the offer notice was one to which section 5B applied (sale by auction), the restrictions are—

(a) that the disposal is made by means of a sale at a public auction, and

(b) that the other terms correspond to those specified in the offer notice.

(3) In any other case the restrictions are—

(a) that the deposit and consideration required are not less than those specified in the offer notice, and

(b) that the other terms correspond to those specified in the offer notice.

(4) The entitlement of a landlord, by virtue of this section or any other corresponding provision of this Part, to dispose of the protected interest during a specified period of 12 months extends only to a disposal of that interest, and accordingly the requirements of section 1(1) must be satisfied with respect to any other disposal by him during that period of 12 months (unless the disposal is not a relevant disposal affecting any premises to which at the time of the disposal this Part applies).

LANDLORD'S OBLIGATIONS IN CASE OF ACCEPTANCE AND NOMINATION

8.—(1) This section applies where a landlord serves an offer notice on the qualifying tenants of the constituent flat and—

(a) an acceptance notice is duly served on him, and

(b) a person is duly nominated for the purposes of section 6,

by the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats.

(2) Subject to the following provisions of this Part, the landlord shall not dispose of the protected interest except to the nominated person.

(3) The landlord shall, within the period of one month beginning with the date of service of notice of nomination, either—

(a) serve notice on the nominated person indicating an intention no longer to proceed with the disposal of the protected interest, or

(b) be obliged to proceed in accordance with the following provisions of this Part.

(4) A notice under subsection (3)(a) is a notice of withdrawal for the purposes of section 9B(2) to (4) (consequences of notice of withdrawal by landlord).

(5) Nothing in this section shall be taken as prejudicing the application of the provisions of this Part to any further offer notice served by the landlord on the qualifying tenants of the constituent flats.

LANDLORD'S OBLIGATION: GENERAL PROVISIONS

8A.—(1) This section applies where the landlord is obliged to proceed and the offer notice was not one to which section 5B applied (sale by auction).

(2) The landlord shall, within the period of one month beginning with the date of service of the notice of nomination, send to the nominated person a form of contract for the acquisition of the protected interest on the terms specified in the landlord's offer notice.

(3) If he fails to do so, the following provisions of this Part apply as if he had given notice under section 9B (notice of withdrawal by landlord) at the end of that period.

(4) If the landlord complies with subsection (2), the nominated person shall, within the period of two months beginning with the date on which it is sent or such longer period beginning with that date as may be agreed between the landlord and that person, either—

(a) serve notice on the landlord indicating an intention no longer to proceed with the acquisition of the protected interest, or

(b) offer an exchange of contracts, that is to say, sign the contract and send it to the landlord, together with the requisite deposit.

In this subsection "the requisite deposit" means a deposit of an amount determined by or under the contract or an amount equal to 10 per cent. of the consideration, whichever is the less.

(5) If the nominated person—

(a) serves notice in pursuance of paragraph (a) of subsection (4), or

(b) fails to offer an exchange of contracts within the period specified in that subsection,

the following provisions of this Part apply as if he had given notice under section 9A (withdrawal by nominated person) at the same time as that notice or, as the case may be, at the end of that period.

(6) If the nominated person offers an exchange of contracts within the period specified in subsection (4), but the landlord fails to complete the exchange within the period of seven days beginning with the day on which he received that person's contract, the following provisions of this Part apply as if the landlord had given notice under section 9B (withdrawal by landlord) at the end of that period.

LANDLORD'S OBLIGATION: ELECTION IN CASE OF SALE AT AUCTION

8B.—(1) This section applies where the landlord is obliged to proceed and the offer notice was one to which section 5B applied (sale by auction).

(2) The nominated person may, by notice served on the landlord not less than 28 days before the date of the auction, elect that the provisions of this section shall apply.

(3) If a contract for the disposal is entered into at the auction, the landlord shall, within the period of seven days beginning with the date of the auction, send a copy of the contract to the nominated person.

(4) If, within the period of 28 days beginning with date on which such a copy is so sent, the nominated person—

(a) serves notice on the landlord accepting the terms of the contract, and

(b) fulfils any conditions falling to be fulfilled by the purchaser on entering into the contract,

the contract shall have effect as if the nominated person, and not the purchaser, had entered into the contract.

(5) Unless otherwise agreed, any time limit in the contract as it has effect by virtue of subsection (4) shall start to run again on the service of notice under that subsection; and nothing in the contract as it has effect by virtue of a notice under this section shall require the nominated person to complete the purchase before the end of the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which he is deemed to have entered into the contract.

(6) If the nominated person—

(a) does not serve notice on the landlord under subsection (2) by the time mentioned in that subsection, or

(b) does not satisfy the requirements of subsection (4) within the period mentioned in that subsection,

the following provisions of this Part apply as if he had given notice under section 9A (withdrawal by nominated person) at the end of that period.

ELECTION IN CASE OF DISPOSAL FOR NON-MONETARY CONSIDERATION

8C.—(1) This section applies where an acceptance notice is duly served on the landlord indicating an intention to accept the offer referred to in section 5E (offer notice: disposal for non-monetary consideration).

(2) The requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats may, by notice served on the landlord within—

(a) the period specified in the offer notice for nominating a person or persons for the purposes of section 6, or

(b) such longer period as may be agreed between the landlord and the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats,

elect that the following provisions shall apply.

(3) Where such an election is made and the landlord disposes of the protected interest on terms corresponding to those specified in his offer notice in accordance with section 5A, 5B, 5C or 5D, sections 11 to 17 shall have effect as if—

(a) no notice under section 5 had been served;

(b) in section 11A(3) (period for serving notice requiring information, &c.), the reference to four months were a reference to 28 days; and

(c) in section 12A(2) and 12B(3) (period for exercise of tenants' rights against purchaser) each reference to six months were a reference to two months.

(4) For the purposes of sections 11 to 17 as they have effect by virtue of subsection (3) so much of the consideration for the original disposal as did not consist of money shall be treated as such amount in money as was equivalent to its value in the hands of the landlord.

The landlord or the nominated person may apply to have that amount determined by a leasehold valuation tribunal.

DISPOSAL IN PURSUANCE OF OPTION OR RIGHT OF PRE-EMPTION

8D.—(1) Where—

(a) the original disposal was the grant of an option or right of pre-emption, and

(b) in pursuance of the option or right, the landlord makes another disposal affecting the premises ("the later disposal") before the end of the period specified in subsection (2),

sections 11 to 17 shall have effect as if the later disposal, and not the original disposal, were the relevant disposal.

(2) The period referred to in subsection (1)(b) is the period of four months beginning with the date by which—

(a) notices under section 3A of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (duty of new landlord to inform tenants of rights) relating to the original disposal, or

(b) where that section does not apply, documents of any other description—

(i) indicating that the original disposal has taken place, and

(ii) alerting the tenants to the existence of their rights under this Part and the time within which any such rights must be exercised,

have been served on the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats.

8E.—(1) Where the landlord is obliged to proceed but is precluded by a covenant, condition or other obligation from disposing of the protected interest to the nominated person unless the consent of some other person is obtained—

(a) he shall use his best endeavours to secure that the consent of that person to that disposal is given, and

(b) if it appears to him that that person is obliged not to withhold his consent unreasonably but has nevertheless so withheld it, he shall institute proceedings for a declaration to that effect.

(2) Subsection (1) ceases to apply if a notice of withdrawal is served under section 9A or 9B (withdrawal of either party from transaction) or if notice is served under section 10 (lapse of landlord's offer: premises ceasing to be premises to which this Part applies).

(3) Where the landlord has discharged any duty imposed on him by subsection (1) but any such consent as is there mentioned has been withheld, and no such declaration as is there mentioned has been made, the landlord may serve a notice on the nominated person stating that to be the case.

When such a notice has been served, the landlord may, during the period of 12 months beginning with the date of service of the notice, dispose of the protected interest to such person as he thinks fit, but subject to the following restrictions.

(4) Where the offer notice was one to which section 5B applied (sale by auction), the restrictions are—

(a) that the disposal is made by means of a sale at a public auction, and

(b) that the other terms correspond to those specified in the offer notice.

(5) In any other case the restrictions are—

(a) that the deposit and consideration required are not less than those specified in the offer notice or, if higher, those agreed between the landlord and the nominated person (subject to contract), and

(b) that the other terms correspond to those specified in the offer notice.

(6) Where notice is given under subsection (3), the landlord may recover from the nominated party and the qualifying tenants who served the acceptance notice any costs reasonably incurred by him in connection with the disposal between the end of the first four weeks of the nomination period and the time when that notice is served by him.

Any such liability of the nominated person and those tenants is a joint and several liability.

NOTICE OF WITHDRAWAL BY NOMINATED PERSON

9A.—(1) Where the landlord is obliged to proceed, the nominated person may serve notice on the landlord (a "notice of withdrawal") indicating his intention no longer to proceed with the acquisition of the protected interest.

(2) If at any time the nominated person becomes aware that the number of the qualifying tenants of the constituent flats desiring to proceed with the acquisition of the protected interest is less than the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of those flats, he shall forthwith serve a notice of withdrawal.

(3) Where notice of withdrawal is given by the nominated person under this section, the landlord may, during the period of 12 months beginning with the date of service of the notice, dispose of the protected interest to such person as he thinks fit, but subject to the following restrictions.

(4) Where the offer notice was one to which section 5B applied (sale by auction), the restrictions are—

(a) that the disposal is made by means of a sale at a public auction, and

(b) that the other terms correspond to those specified in the offer notice.

(5) In any other case the restrictions are—

(a) that the deposit and consideration required are not less than those specified in the offer notice or, if higher, those agreed between the landlord and the nominated person (subject to contract), and

(b) that the other terms correspond to those specified in the offer notice.

(6) If notice of withdrawal is served under this section before the end of the first four weeks of the nomination period specified in the offer notice, the nominated person and the qualifying tenants who served the acceptance notice are not liable for any costs incurred by the landlord in connection with the disposal.

(7) If notice of withdrawal is served under this section after the end of those four weeks, the landlord may recover from the nominated person and the qualifying tenants who served the acceptance notice any costs reasonably incurred by him in connection with the disposal between the end of those four weeks and the time when the notice of withdrawal was served on him.

Any such liability of the nominated person and those tenants is a joint and several liability.

(8) This section does not apply after a binding contract for the disposal of the protected interest—

(a) has been entered into by the landlord and the nominated person, or

(b) has otherwise come into existence between the landlord and the nominated person by virtue of any provision of this Part.

NOTICE OF WITHDRAWAL BY LANDLORD

9B.—(1) Where the landlord is obliged to proceed, he may serve notice on the nominated person (a "notice of withdrawal") indicating his intention no longer to proceed with the disposal of the protected interest.

(2) Where a notice of withdrawal is given by the landlord, he is not entitled to dispose of the protected interest during the period of 12 months beginning with the date of service of the notice.

(3) If a notice of withdrawal is served before the end of the first four weeks of the nomination period specified in the offer notice, the landlord is not liable for any costs incurred in connection with the disposal by the nominated person and the qualifying tenants who served the acceptance notice.

(4) If a notice of withdrawal is served after the end of those four weeks, the nominated person and the qualifying tenants who served the acceptance notice may recover from the landlord any costs reasonably incurred by them in connection with the disposal between the end of those four weeks and the time when the notice of withdrawal was served.

(5) This section does not apply after a binding contract for the disposal of the protected interest—

(a) has been entered into by the landlord and the nominated person, or

(b) has otherwise come into existence between the landlord and the nominated person by virtue of any provision of this Part.

LAPSE OF LANDLORD'S OFFER

10.—(1) If after a landlord has served an offer notice the premises concerned cease to be premises to which this Part applies, the landlord may serve a notice on the qualifying tenants of the constituent flats stating—

(a) that the premises have ceased to be premises to which this Part applies, and

(b) that the offer notice, and anything done in pursuance of it, is to be treated as not having been served or done;

and on the service of such a notice the provisions of this Part cease to have effect in relation to that disposal.

(2) A landlord who has not served such a notice on all of the qualifying tenants of the constituent flats shall nevertheless be treated as having duly served a notice under subsection (1)—

(a) if he has served such a notice on not less than 90 per cent of those tenants, or

(b) where those qualifying tenants number less than ten, if he has served such a notice on all but one of them.

(3) Where the landlord is entitled to serve a notice under subsection (1) but does not do so, this Part shall continue to have effect in relation to the disposal in question as if the premises in question were still premises to which this Part applies.

(4) The above provisions of this section do not apply after a binding contract for the disposal of the protected interest—

(a) has been entered into by the landlord and the nominated person, or

(b) has otherwise come into existence between the landlord and the nominated person by virtue of any provision of this Part.

(5) Where a binding contract for the disposal of the protected interest has been entered into between the landlord and the nominated person but it has been lawfully rescinded by the landlord, the landlord may, during the period of 12 months beginning with the date of the rescission of the contract, dispose of that interest to such person (and on such terms) as he thinks fit.".

PART II

ENFORCEMENT BY TENANTS OF RIGHTS AGAINST PURCHASER

The following sections are substituted for sections 11 to 15 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987—

"Enforcement by tenants of rights against purchaser

CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH TENANTS' RIGHTS ENFORCEABLE AGAINST PURCHASER

11.—(1) The following provisions of this Part apply where a landlord has made a relevant disposal affecting premises to which at the time of the disposal this Part applied ("the original disposal"), and either—

(a) no notice was served by the landlord under section 5 with respect to that disposal, or

(b) the disposal was made in contravention of any provision of sections 6 to 10,

and the premises are still premises to which this Part applies.

(2) In those circumstances the requisite majority of the qualifying tenants of the flats contained in the premises affected by the relevant disposal (the "constituent flats") have the rights conferred by the following provisions—

section 11A (right to information as to terms of disposal, &c.),

section 12A (right of qualifying tenants to take benefit of contract),

section 12B (right of qualifying tenants to compel sale, &c. by purchaser), and

section 12C (right of qualifying tenants to compel grant of new tenancy by superior landlord).

(3) In those sections the transferee under the original disposal (or, in the case of the surrender of a tenancy, the superior landlord) is referred to as "the purchaser".

This shall not be read as restricting the operation of those provisions to disposals for consideration.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION AS TO TERMS OF DISPOSAL, &C

11A.—(1) The requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats may serve a notice on the purchaser requiring him—

(a) to give particulars of the terms on which the original disposal was made (including the deposit and consideration required) and the date on which it was made, and

(b) where the disposal consisted of entering into a contract, to provide a copy of the contract.

(2) The notice must specify the name and address of the person to whom (on behalf of the tenants) the particulars are to be given, or the copy of the contract provided.

(3) Any notice under this section must be served before the end of the period of four months beginning with the date by which—

(a) notices under section 3A of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (duty of new landlord to inform tenants of rights) relating to the original disposal, or

(b) where that section does not apply, documents of any other description—

(i) indicating that the original disposal has taken place, and

(ii) alerting the tenants to the existence of their rights under this Part and the time within which any such rights must be exercised,

have been served on the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats.

(4) A person served with a notice under this section shall comply with it within the period of one month beginning with the date on which it is served on him.

RIGHT OF QUALIFYING TENANTS TO TAKE BENEFIT OF CONTRACT

12A.—(1) Where the original disposal consisted of entering into a contract, the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats may by notice to the landlord elect that the contract shall have effect as if entered into not with the purchaser but with a person or persons nominated for the purposes of this section by the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats.

(2) Any such notice must be served before the end of the period of six months beginning—

(a) if a notice was served on the purchaser under section 11A (right to information as to terms of disposal, &c.), with the date on which the purchaser complied with that notice;

(b) in any other case, with the date by which documents of any description—

(i) indicating that the original disposal has taken place, and

(ii) alerting the tenants to the existence of their rights under this Part and the time within which any such rights must be exercised,

have been served on the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats.

(3) The notice shall not have effect as mentioned in subsection (1) unless the nominated person—

(a) fulfils any requirements as to the deposit required on entering into the contract, and

(b) fulfils any other conditions required to be fulfilled by the purchaser on entering into the contract.

(4) Unless otherwise agreed, any time limit in the contract as it has effect by virtue of a notice under this section shall start to run again on the service of that notice; and nothing in the contract as it has effect by virtue of a notice under this section shall require the nominated person to complete the purchase before the end of the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which he is deemed to have entered into the contract.

(5) Where the original disposal related to other property in addition to premises to which this Part applied at the time of the disposal—

(a) a notice under this section has effect only in relation to the premises to which this Part applied at the time of the original disposal, and

(b) the terms of the contract shall have effect with any necessary modifications.

In such a case the notice under this section may specify the subject–matter of the disposal, and the terms on which the disposal is to be made (whether doing so expressly or by reference to the original disposal), or may provide for that estate or interest, or any such terms, to be determined by a leasehold valuation tribunal.

12B.—(1) This section applies where—

(a) the original disposal consisted of entering into a contract and no notice has been served under section 12A (right of qualifying tenants to take benefit of contract), or

(b) the original disposal did not consist of entering into a contract.

(2) The requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats may serve a notice (a "purchase notice") on the purchaser requiring him to dispose of the estate or interest that was the subject–matter of the original disposal, on the terms on which it was made (including those relating to the consideration payable), to a person or persons nominated for the purposes of this section by any such majority of qualifying tenants of those flats.

(3) Any such notice must be served before the end of the period of six months beginning—

(a) if a notice was served on the purchaser under section 11A (right to information as to terms of disposal, &c.), with the date on which the purchaser complied with that notice;

(b) in any other case, with the date by which—

(i) notices under section 3A of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (duty of new landlord to inform tenants of rights) relating to the original disposal, or

(ii) where that section does not apply, documents of any other description indicating that the original disposal has taken place, and alerting the tenants to the existence of their rights under this Part and the time within which any such rights must be exercised,

have been served on the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats.

(4) A purchase notice shall where the original disposal related to other property in addition to premises to which this Part applied at the time of the disposal—

(a) require the purchaser only to make a disposal relating to those premises, and

(b) require him to do so on the terms referred to in subsection (2) with any necessary modifications.

In such a case the purchase notice may specify the subject–matter of the disposal, and the terms on which the disposal is to be made (whether doing so expressly or by reference to the original disposal), or may provide for those matters to be determined by a leasehold valuation tribunal.

(5) Where the property which the purchaser is required to dispose of in pursuance of the purchase notice has since the original disposal become subject to any charge or other incumbrance, then, unless the court by order directs otherwise—

(a) in the case of a charge to secure the payment of money or the performance of any other obligation by the purchaser or any other person, the instrument by virtue of which the property is disposed of by the purchaser to the person or persons nominated for the purposes of this section shall (subject to the provisions of Part I of Schedule 1) operate to discharge the property from that charge; and

(b) in the case of any other incumbrance, the property shall be so disposed of subject to the incumbrance but with a reduction in the consideration payable to the purchaser corresponding to the amount by which the existence of the incumbrance reduces the value of the property.

(6) Subsection (5)(a) and Part I of Schedule 1 apply, with any necessary modifications, to mortgages and liens as they apply to charges; but nothing in those provisions applies to a rent charge.

(7) Where the property which the purchaser is required to dispose of in pursuance of the purchase notice has since the original disposal increased in monetary value owing to any change in circumstances (other than a change in the value of money), the amount of the consideration payable to the purchaser for the disposal by him of the property in pursuance of the purchase notice shall be the amount that might reasonably have been obtained on a corresponding disposal made on the open market at the time of the original disposal if the change in circumstances had already taken place.

RIGHT OF QUALIFYING TENANTS TO COMPEL GRANT OF NEW TENANCY BY SUPERIOR LANDLORD

12C.—(1) This section applies where the original disposal consisted of the surrender by the landlord of a tenancy held by him ("the relevant tenancy").

(2) The requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats may serve a notice on the purchaser requiring him to grant a new tenancy of the premises which were subject to the relevant tenancy, on the same terms as those of the relevant tenancy and so as to expire on the same date as that tenancy would have expired, to a person or persons nominated for the purposes of this section by any such majority of qualifying tenants of those flats.

(3) Any such notice must be served before the end of the period of six months beginning—

(a) if a notice was served on the purchaser under section 11A (right to information as to terms of disposal, &c.), with the date on which the purchaser complied with that notice;

(b) in any other case, with the date by which documents of any description—

(i) indicating that the original disposal has taken place, and

(ii) alerting the tenants to the existence of their rights under this Part and the time within which any such rights must be exercised,

have been served on the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats.

(4) If the purchaser paid any amount to the landlord as consideration for the surrender by him of that tenancy, the nominated person shall pay that amount to the purchaser.

(5) Where the premises subject to the relevant tenancy included premises other than premises to which this Part applied at the time of the disposal, a notice under this section shall—

(a) require the purchaser only to grant a new tenancy relating to the premises to which this Part then applied, and

(b) require him to do so on the terms referred to in subsection (2) subject to any necessary modifications.

(6) The purchase notice may specify the subject–matter of the disposal, and the terms on which the disposal is to be made (whether doing so expressly or by reference to the original disposal), or may provide for those matters to be determined by a leasehold valuation tribunal.

NOMINATED PERSONS: SUPPLEMENTARY PROVISIONS

12D.—(1) The person or persons initially nominated for the purposes of section 12A, 12B or 12C shall be nominated in the notice under that section.

(2) A person nominated for those purposes by the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats may be replaced by another person so nominated if, and only if, he has (for any reason) ceased to be able to act as a nominated person.

(3) Where two or more persons have been nominated and any of them ceases to act without being replaced, the remaining person or persons so nominated may continue to act.

(4) Where, in the exercise of its power to award costs, the court or the Lands Tribunal makes, in connection with any proceedings arising under or by virtue of this Part, an award of costs against the person or persons so nominated, the liability for those costs is a joint and several liability of that person or those persons together with the qualifying tenants by whom the relevant notice was served.

DETERMINATION OF QUESTIONS BY LEASEHOLD VALUATION TRIBUNAL

13.—(1) A leasehold valuation tribunal has jurisdiction to hear and determine—

(a) any question arising in relation to any matters specified in a notice under section 12A, 12B or 12C, and

(b) any question arising for determination as mentioned in section 8C(4), 12A(5) or 12B(4) (matters left for determination by tribunal).

(2) On an application under this section the interests of the persons by whom the notice was served under section 12A, 12B or 12C shall be represented by the nominated person; and accordingly the parties to any such application shall not include those persons.

WITHDRAWAL OF NOMINATED PERSON FROM TRANSACTION UNDER S.12B OR 12C

14.—(1) Where notice has been duly served on the landlord under—

section 12B (right of qualifying tenants to compel sale, &c. by purchaser), or

section 12C (right of qualifying tenants to compel grant of new tenancy by superior landlord),

the nominated person may at any time before a binding contract is entered into in pursuance of the notice, serve notice under this section on the purchaser (a "notice of withdrawal") indicating an intention no longer to proceed with the disposal.

(2) If at any such time the nominated person becomes aware that the number of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats desiring to proceed with the disposal is less than the requisite majority of those tenants, he shall forthwith serve a notice of withdrawal.

(3) If a notice of withdrawal is served under this section the purchaser may recover from the nominated person any costs reasonably incurred by him in connection with the disposal down to the time when the notice is served on him.

(4) If a notice of withdrawal is served at a time when proceedings arising under or by virtue of this Part are pending before the court or the Lands Tribunal, the liability of the nominated person for any costs incurred by the purchaser as mentioned in subsection (3) shall be such as may be determined by the court or (as the case may be) by the Tribunal.

(5) The costs that may be recovered by the purchaser under this section do not include any costs incurred by him in connection with an application to a leasehold valuation tribunal.".

PART III

ENFORCEMENT OF RIGHTS AGAINST SUBSEQUENT PURCHASERS AND TERMINATION OF RIGHTS

The following sections replace sections 16 and 17 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987—

"Enforcement by tenants of rights against subsequent purchasers

RIGHTS OF QUALIFYING TENANTS AGAINST SUBSEQUENT PURCHASER

16.—(1) This section applies where, at the time when a notice is served on the purchaser under section 11A, 12A, 12B or 12C, he no longer holds the estate or interest that was the subject–matter of the original disposal.

(2) In the case of a notice under section 11A (right to information as to terms of disposal, &c.) the purchaser shall, within the period for complying with that notice—

(a) serve notice on the person specified in the notice as the person to whom particulars are to be provided of the name and address of the person to whom he has disposed of that estate or interest ("the subsequent purchaser"), and

(b) serve on the subsequent purchaser a copy of the notice under section 11A and of the particulars given by him in response to it.

(3) In the case of a notice under section 12A, 12B or 12C the purchaser shall forthwith—

(a) forward the notice to the subsequent purchaser, and

(b) serve on the nominated person notice of the name and address of the subsequent purchaser.

(4) Once the purchaser serves a notice in accordance with subsection (2)(a) or (3)(b), sections 12A to 14 shall, instead of applying to the purchaser, apply to the subsequent purchaser as if he were the transferee under the original disposal.

(5) Subsections (1) to (4) have effect, with any necessary modifications, in a case where, instead of disposing of the whole of the estate or interest referred to in subsection (1) to another person, the purchaser has disposed of it in part or in parts to one or more other persons.

In such a case, sections 12A to 14—

(a) apply to the purchaser in relation to any part of that estate or interest retained by him, and

(b) in relation to any part of that estate or interest disposed of to any other person, apply to that other person instead as if he were (as respects that part) the transferee under the original disposal.

Termination of rights against purchasers or subsequent purchasers

TERMINATION OF RIGHTS AGAINST PURCHASER OR SUBSEQUENT PURCHASER

17.—(1) If, at any time after a notice has been served under section 11A, 12A, 12B or 12C, the premises affected by the original disposal cease to be premises to which this Part applies, the purchaser may serve a notice on the qualifying tenants of the constituent flats stating—

(a) that the premises have ceased to be premises to which this Part applies, and

(b) that any such notice served on him, and anything done in pursuance of it, is to be treated as not having been served or done.

(2) A landlord who has not served such a notice on all of the qualifying tenants of the constituent flats shall nevertheless be treated as having duly served a notice under subsection (1)—

(a) if he has served such a notice on not less than 90% of those tenants, or

(b) where those qualifying tenants number less than ten, if he has served such a notice on all but one of them.

(3) Where a period of three months beginning with the date of service of a notice under section 12A, 12B or 12C on the purchaser has expired—

(a) without any binding contract having been entered into between the purchaser and the nominated person, and

(b) without there having been made any application in connection with the notice to the court or to a leasehold valuation tribunal,

the purchaser may serve on the nominated person a notice stating that the notice, and anything done in pursuance of it, is to be treated as not having been served or done.

(4) Where any such application as is mentioned in subsection (3)(b) was made within the period of three months referred to in that subsection, but—

(a) a period of two months beginning with the date of the determination of that application has expired,

(b) no binding contract has been entered into between the purchaser and the nominated person, and

(c) no other such application as is mentioned in subsection (3)(b) is pending,

the purchaser may serve on the nominated person a notice stating that any notice served on him under section 12A, 12B or 12C, and anything done in pursuance of any such notice, is to be treated as not having been served or done.

(5) Where the purchaser serves a notice in accordance with subsection (1), (3) or (4), this Part shall cease to have effect in relation to him in connection with the original disposal.

(6) Where a purchaser is entitled to serve a notice under subsection (1) but does not do so, this Part shall continue to have effect in relation to him in connection with the original disposal as if the premises in question were still premises to which this Part applies.

(7) References in this section to the purchaser include a subsequent purchaser to whom sections 12A to 14 apply by virtue of section 16(4) or (5).".

PART IV

CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

1. In section 4(2) of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 ((relevant disposals: excluded disposals), in paragraph (aa) (disposals by way of security for a loan) omit the words "consisting of the creation of an estate or interest".

2. Before section 19 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987, under the heading "*Supplementary provisions*", insert—

"*The requisite majority of qualifying tenants.*

18A.—(1) In this Part "the requisite majority of qualifying tenants of the constituent flats" means qualifying tenants of constituent flats with more than 50 per cent. of the available votes.

(2) The total number of available votes shall be determined as follows—

(a) where an offer notice has been served under section 5, that number is equal to the total number of constituent flats let to qualifying tenants on the date when the period specified in that notice as the period for accepting the offer expires;

(b) where a notice is served under section 11A without a notice having been previously served under section 5, that number is equal to the total number of constituent flats let to qualifying tenants on the date of service of the notice under section 11A;

(c) where a notice is served under section 12A, 12B or 12C without a notice having been previously served under section 5 or section 11A, that number is equal to the total number of constituent flats let to qualifying tenants on the date of service of the notice under section 12A, 12B or 12C, as the case may be.

(3) There is one available vote in respect of each of the flats so let on the date referred to in the relevant paragraph of subsection (2), which shall be attributed to the qualifying tenant to whom it is let.

(4) The persons constituting the requisite majority of qualifying tenants for one purpose may be different from the persons constituting such a majority for another purpose.".

3.—(1) Section 20(1) of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 (interpretation of Part I) is amended as follows.

(2) For the definition of "acceptance notice" substitute—

""acceptance notice" has the meaning given by section 6(3);".

(3) For the definition of "constituent flat" substitute—

""constituent flat" shall be construed in accordance with section 5(1) or 11(2), as the case may require;".

(4) Omit the definition of "the new landlord".

(5) After that definition insert—

""the nominated person" means the person or persons for the time being nominated by the requisite majority of the qualifying tenants of the constituent flats for the purposes of section 6, 12A, 12B or 12C, as the case may require;".

(6) For the definition of "the protected interest" substitute—

""the protected interest" means the estate, interest or other subject-matter of an offer notice;".

(7) After that definition insert—

""the protected period" has the meaning given by section 6(4);".

(8) For the definition of "purchase notice" substitute—

""purchase notice" has the meaning given by section 12B(2);".

(9) After that definition insert—

""purchaser" has the meaning given by section 11(3);".

(10) In the definition of "the requisite majority" for "section 5(6) and (7)" substitute "section 18A".

4. In section 20(2) of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987, omit the words "or counter-offer" in each place where they occur.

5. In Part III of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 (compulsory acquisition by tenants of their landlord's interest), in section 31 (determination of terms by rent assessment committees)—

(a) for "rent assessment committee", wherever occurring, substitute "leasehold valuation tribunal";

(b) for "such a committee" or "the committee", wherever occurring, substitute "the tribunal"; and

(c) omit subsection (5).

6. In section 52(1) of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 (jurisdiction of county courts) for "rent assessment committee" substitute "leasehold valuation tribunal".

7. After section 52 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 insert—

"*Jurisdiction of leasehold valuation tribunal under Part I or III.*

52A.—(1) Any jurisdiction conferred by Part I or III of this Act on a leasehold valuation tribunal is exercisable by a rent assessment committee constituted in accordance with Schedule 10 to the Rent Act 1977 which when so constituted for the purposes of exercising any such jurisdiction shall be known as a leasehold valuation tribunal.

(2) The power to make regulations under section 74(1)(b) of the Rent Act 1977 (procedure of rent assessment committees) extends to prescribing the procedure to be followed in connection with any proceedings before a leasehold valuation tribunal under this Act.

(3) Any application under this Act to a leasehold valuation tribunal must be in such form, and contain such particulars, as the Secretary of State may by regulations prescribe.

(4) Any costs incurred by a party to any such application in connection with the application shall be borne by that party.

(5) Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 7 of Schedule 22 to the Housing Act 1980 (supplementary provisions relating to leasehold valuation tribunals: constitution, appeals and provision of information) apply to a leasehold valuation tribunal constituted for the purposes of this section.".

8. In section 53(2)(b) of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 (regulations subject to negative resolution), for the words from "section 13(2)" to "section 31)" substitute "section 52A(3)".

9. In section 54(4) of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 (saving for power under section 20(4)) for "either of the periods specified in section 5(2)" substitute "any of the periods specified in section 5A(4) or (5), 5B(5) or (6), 5C(4) or (5), 5D(4) or (5) or 5E(3)".

10. In section 60(1) of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 (general interpretation), omit the definition of "rent assessment committee".

11.—(1) In Schedule 1 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 (discharge of mortgages, &c), in paragraph 1 (construction of provisions relating to discharge in pursuance of purchase notice)—

(a) for the words "the new landlord" wherever they appear substitute "the purchaser";

(b) in the definition of "consideration payable"—

(i) for the words "section 12(4)" substitute "section 12B(7)", and

(ii) for the words "section 16(2) or (3)" substitute "section 16(4) or (5)";

(c) in the definition of "nominated person", for the words "section 12(1)" substitute "section 12B(2)".

(2) In paragraphs 2, 4 and 5 of that Schedule (duty of nominated person to redeem mortgages, payments into court and savings)—

(a) for the words "section 12(4)(a)" wherever they appear substitute "section 12B(5)(a)";

(b) for the words "the new landlord" or "the new landlord's" wherever they appear substitute "the purchaser" or "the purchaser's".")

Amendment made to the Lords amendment: (a), in line 183, leave out 'within' and insert

'at the same time as the acceptance notice is served or at any time after that notice is served and before the end of—'— *[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Lords amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Schedule 8

Low Rent Test: Extension of Rights

Lords amendment: No. 288, in page 148, line 4, leave out ("fifty") and insert ("thirty–five")

Amendment proposed to the Lords amendment: (a), Leave out 'thirty–five' and insert 'twenty–one'.— *[Mr. Raynsford.]*

Question put, That the amendment to the Lords amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 119, Noes 239.

Division No. 209] **[8.16 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin–Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Benn, Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Miss Kate
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Hoyle, Doug
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Gerald
Khabra, Piara S
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Olner, Bill
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Sheldon, Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Vaz, Keith
Welsh, Andrew
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and
Mr. Joe Benton.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William

Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas–Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson–Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Horder, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Michael
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hers'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Dr. Liam Fox and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

Question accordingly negatived.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 289 to 296 agreed to.

Schedule 10

ADMINISTRATION OF HOUSING BENEFIT

Lords amendment: No. 297, in page 160, line 35, at end insert—

("( ) For subsection (5) (agreements with other authorities for carrying out of functions) substitute—

"(5) Authorities may—

(a) agree that one shall discharge functions relating to housing benefit on another's behalf, or

(b) discharge any such functions jointly or arrange for their discharge by a joint committee.

(5A) Nothing in this section shall be read as excluding the general provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 or the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 from applying in relation to the housing benefit functions of a local authority.".")

Mr. Clappison: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendments Nos. 298 and 299.

Mr. Clappison: The purpose of these amendments is to clarify the provisions that enable an authority to carry out housing benefit functions on behalf of or jointly with one or more other authorities and to introduce flexibility in the payment of housing benefit subsidy where authorities agree to combine activities.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 298 to 329 agreed to [one with Special Entry].

WATER POLICY

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 5939/96, on European Community water policy, and 8600/94, on ecological quality of water; and endorses the Government's objective of ensuring that the Commission's review of European water policy provides for the proper assessment of water priorities, including the evaluation of costs and benefits of different policy measures.—[*Mr. Conway.*]

Amendment proposed: at the end of the Question, to add—

'and calls on Her Majesty's Government to invite the Governments of each Member state of the European Community, together with the Governments of adjacent states, to embark on an international study of their respective policies and systems of hydrological regulation, with a view to publishing conclusions on mutually acceptable systems of control, surveillance, specification or standards of water quality.'.—[*Mr. Spearing.*]

Question, That the amendment be made, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102 (European Standing Committees), and negatived.*

Main Question put and agreed to.

OFFICE COSTS ALLOWANCE

Resolved,

That, in the opinion of this House, paragraph (1) of the Resolution of this House of 10th July 1996 about the Office Costs Allowance should be treated as if the words after '£11,591' had not been included.—[*Mr. Conway.*]

PETITION

Bierley Estate

8.33 pm

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): I present to the House a petition on behalf of the residents of the Bierley estate in Bradford and associated areas, on which there are more than 2,000 names. It declares that they are opposed to Bradford community health trust's proposal to redevelop the site of Bierley Hall hospital as a medium secure unit, and concludes:

Your Petitioners therefore humbly pray your Honourable House to urge the community health trust and the community health council to note the opposition of local residents and local elected Members and consider alternative plans for the redevelopment of the site.

To lie upon the Table.

Schools (East Dartford)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

8.34 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise the issue of school places in east Dartford. I do so because I am concerned and alarmed that the educational infrastructure of east Dartford is not apparently being developed as fast as it should, to take account of the current growth in the school-aged population and the tremendous growth yet to occur given the planned expansion in houses and jobs along the Kent Thameside area in my constituency and north of the A2.

There is a problem in east Dartford, with the demand for places in local primary schools well outstripping supply. In some—in fact, too many—instances, and despite the appeals system, parents with children in primary schools in east Dartford and on Temple Hill have failed to secure placements for siblings in the school attended by the first child.

For too many parents, places have been made available for second and subsequent children in schools in central and west Dartford, which poses problems for families in which the mother has no private means of transport. The mother is faced with the prospect of collecting and delivering one child to a school on the east of Dartford, while being expected to collect and deliver another at the same or similar time to a school in the west of Dartford. To do so is impossible, yet schools on the east of Dartford are full. At least one school has, through its governing body, made representations to me and the local education authority on the difficulty of coping with over-subscription on a large scale.

If Dartford were a static community, it would be easy to dismiss the upsurge in the school-aged population as a temporary phenomenon. However, it is not; it is dynamic and, to date, there has been a significant increase in new housing in the eastern and riverside areas of the borough of Dartford—thus the upsurge in the numbers of young children is augmented by families who have moved into the local authority area. The problem exists now, and needs to be dealt with now. It will only get worse in the Thames gateway area, as more and more development proceeds.

The local education authority has addressed the problem to a point by increasing the size of schools in and around central Dartford, with some enlargement in Stone and at the Brent. A new primary school is planned for the Bexley hospital site to the west, as is one in Swanscombe, but I fear that all this enlargement and new build is inadequate to eliminate the problem. A new secondary school is also planned in the Swanscombe-Greenhithe-Stone area, which is welcome but, I fear, inadequate given the time scale necessary for taking forward new build.

I hope that I am wrong in my fears, but I am of an age to remember the example of the Kirkby estate in the former Huyton constituency that was represented for many years by the late Lord Wilson. Kirkby was a huge 1950s overspill estate, built to rehouse Liverpool people from the slums and to provide housing for those whose homes had been lost in the second world war. The estate was big, but it was only after some time that the planners

[Mr. Bob Dunn]

realised that, although they had built much-needed houses, they had forgotten to provide infrastructure for schools, for leisure and for the elderly.

It is inconceivable that the problems of Kirkby should be visited upon north Dartford, and I believe that the Thames gateway is a huge success. But equally I would be failing in my duty as the hon. Member for Dartford if I did not remind the House of the need for decisions to be taken now to secure local sites for education, for the elderly and for leisure.

Much is being done, and has been done, locally, but the co-ordination of forward planning needs to be made crystal clear to the people I represent. Given that from three to five secondary schools and eight to 10 primary schools are needed, I ask my hon. Friend to intervene to help prevent the growth of a problem.

However, before I list my needs, may I inform the House that I wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on 26 May 1995 about the implications of the Thames gateway project? My right hon. Friend pointed out in a letter to me on 21 June:

"My role will be to consider on their merits any statutory proposals which result from this and to determine the level of capital support that can be made available to support the expansion of provision. I understand that at least some of the basic need places we recognised in the most recent capital round for the Dartford area were as a result of the initial stages of this development."

I entirely agree with her, but the problem is now more pressing than when I wrote to her last year, given the rapid pace of development.

I wish to put three points to my hon. Friend the Minister. Will she commit her officials to a real evaluation of the educational needs in my constituency, given the implications of the Thames gateway project? Will she ensure that, after such an audit, she will arrange such liaison as is necessary between the various agencies so as to minimise the time from concept to school opening? Finally, will she inform my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—who offered on 21 June last year to meet me and such a deputation as I could put together to discuss the problems—that we would like to take up the opportunity to visit the Department to discuss at first hand the particular needs and problems faced by my constituents?

I wish to assure my constituents that the House is now aware of the problems they face, and that action is urgently needed. I will do all I can to minimise the conflicts that exist, until such time as new provision is made.

8.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) for drawing this important matter to the attention of the House. He is formidable in pursuing the interests of his constituents on every occasion—not least in education. I hope that, by the time I sit down, I will have answered him fully and given him the help that he seeks.

I know that this debate has been prompted by issues that have caused my hon. Friend great concerns—the problems that his constituents have experienced in getting their children into local schools, and their concerns about the lack of primary school places generally in the east Dartford area.

It is perhaps worth reminding ourselves just how much progress has been made in this area since the present Government took office in 1979. At that time, of course, parents had no say at all in deciding which school their child would attend. Schools could be kept half-empty, but parents would still not be offered a place, and there was certainly no right to appeal against decisions that others had made about the school placement of their children.

Under the arrangements progressively introduced by this Government, parents now have a clear and unequivocal right in law to express a preference for the school they wish their child to attend. Admission authorities—that is, governing bodies of grant-maintained and voluntary-aided schools, and the local education authority for county and controlled schools—must comply with that preference if places are available. The only exceptions to this are denominational schools and selective schools, which may keep places open in order to preserve their particular character.

However, if a school is over-subscribed, it may be that parents do not receive a place since the school can be filled with pupils with better claims for places. It is up to the admissions authority to organise the over-subscription criteria to judge between the claims of candidates for places. Admission authorities may use any lawful criteria in taking decisions about whom to admit.

Under our policy of more open enrolment, schools must admit up to their standard number, or any higher admission limit set. As a result, admission authorities can no longer keep spare places at popular schools to safeguard the viability of other, less popular ones. The bottom line is that, if a school has spare places, eligible children must be admitted.

Parents now have more rights, more information and more access to a wider choice of different schools than ever before. What the Government have tried to do is remove the artificial barriers that, in the past, have all too often stood in the way of parental choice. Evidence suggests that some 90 per cent. of first-choice applications are successful.

Where parents are unsuccessful in gaining a place, they may if they wish exercise their rights to appeal to an independent appeal committee. Appeal committees offer parents an important second chance. They must consider any appeal in the light of the evidence available and the merits of the case before them. Nationally, around 40 per cent. of appeals are successful.

All appeals committees must now contain a lay member, and representatives of the admission authority cannot be in the majority. As a result, parents can now have more confidence that their appeals will be heard by an independent and impartial panel who will carefully weigh up the needs of the child against the implications for the school.

I can understand the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford about the problems that some of his constituents have experienced in getting their children into their local school. I know, too, that he has written to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment about this matter on several occassions.

But these problems are not new. It is impossible to guarantee admission where many more parents have expressed a preference for a school than there are places

available. What we have tried to do is put in place a framework that ensures that responsibility for admissions rests with individual admission authorities, who we believe are best placed to respond to the wishes and needs of parents and pupils.

As I understand it, parents whose children have been refused admission to schools in east Dartford have been offered places at schools in west Dartford. In some cases, these alternative schools are little more than a mile away from where parents live. However, I sympathise with the travel difficulties of parents, which were described so graphically by my hon. Friend.

I now turn to the issue of the supply of school places. My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford will be aware that Kent is a stage 1 authority for the primary sector. Despite the large number of grant-maintained secondary schools in the county, less than 10 per cent. of Kent's primary school population is in grant-maintained schools. That means that Kent local education authority has sole responsibility for ensuring that there are sufficient primary school places in its area for pupils of compulsory school age.

The authority estimates that 5,000 primary school age places will be needed over the next 10 years in the Thames gateway area. Clearly, Dartford is in this growth area, and we have recognised this. In the 1994-95 bidding round for capital funding, we accepted a basic need case for 260 additional primary school places in Dartford and a further 300 primary places the following year. In the 1996-97 capital round, Kent LEA was given an educational capital guideline of over £23 million—by far the largest in the country. That represents 40 per cent. of the authority's total bid—significantly above the national average of 23 per cent. and reflects the extent to which its plans for spending on schools matched the national priority criteria.

Nevertheless, it is for LEAs to decide their capital expenditure priorities and make the best use of the resources available to them. The annual capital guidelines announced are not tied to particular projects, nor do they represent the full total of resources available to LEAs for capital spending: LEAs can invest their capital receipts and can use funds from their revenue budgets for capital purposes if they wish. The Government do not control the funding of individual projects at county or voluntary-controlled schools. I hope that the LEA will take note of what my hon. Friend said tonight.

To fulfil its planning responsibility to ensure a sufficient number of school places, Kent LEA has the power to publish statutory proposals. It can publish them to establish entirely new schools or to make significant enlargements to existing schools. It would be for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consider any proposals that fall to her for decision. However, the LEA can, of course, make non-significant enlargements to existing schools without approval from her. I understand that the authority is considering the need for new primary places in the Dartford area and consulting locally on how to provide 210 additional places.

Governing bodies of grant-maintained schools can make proposals to enlarge their schools. My hon. Friend may recall that two GM primary schools in his constituency followed the statutory procedures and received approval from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for enlargement: Holy Trinity Church of England GM primary, with effect from September 1995; and Horton Kirby Church of England GM primary from September this year.

As my hon. Friend knows, our recently published White Paper proposes that grant-maintained schools should not in future need approval to enlarge their current capacity by up to 50 per cent. It also proposes that, when a new school is needed to meet a shortage of school places, power is given to the Funding Agency for Schools to submit proposals for a new GM school alongside any proposals from the LEA.

Although that would not change the planning responsibility of the LEA to ensure the provision of sufficient places in stage 1 authorities, it should help to promote a wider choice in the range of provision available. Of course, we would consider all proposals on their individual merits. Circumstances will vary in each case, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will take account of all the relevant factors. However, as a matter of general policy, she would favour proposals that enhance diversity.

Let me assure the House that it remains our policy to allow schools to have more freedom to develop in response to popular local demand as well as to increase parental choice. Children have different abilities, aptitudes, interests and needs, which cannot all be met by a single sort of school. The Government want parents to be able to choose from a range of good schools of different sorts, matching what they want for their child with what a school offers. I am confident that that can be achieved in the Dartford area.

Finally, as my hon. Friend appreciates, the issues that he has raised will not be solved overnight, but my Department and my officials stand ready to help. Should he wish to bring a delegation to the Department, I would be only too happy to meet it.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes to Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 23 July 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time upon Tuesday 15 October.

BODMIN MOOR COMMONS BILL *[Lords]*

Ordered,

That the Promoters of the Bodmin Moor Commons Bill *[Lords]* shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with the Bill, if they think fit, in the next Session of Parliament, provided that the Agents for the Bill give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office of their intention to suspend further proceedings not later than the day before the close of the present Session and that all Fees due on the Bill up to that date be paid;

That, if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the next Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the present Session;

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed) and shall be committed to the Chairman of Ways and Means, who shall make such Amendments thereto as have been made by the Committee in the present Session, and shall report the Bill as amended to the House forthwith, and the Bill, so amended, shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the present Session;

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—*-[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Computer Errors

2. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures his Department takes to monitor the impact of computer errors on claimants' benefits. [36957]

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Alistair Burt): All new computer systems, and changes to existing systems, are thoroughly tested before they are put into operation, and they are monitored once they are in operation. All errors are investigated and corrected, and their impact on operations is analysed. Errors affecting benefit payments are corrected as soon as possible and steps are taken to identify all customers affected by them.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Is the Minister aware of the lengthy correspondence that I have had with his Department concerning my constituent, Mr. Peter Sutton, whose benefit was affected by computer errors, to his detriment? In particular, has the Minister had an opportunity to look at the letter of 16 May, sent from the private office of his colleague, the Under-Secretary of State, saying that some 10,200 claimants' benefits had been affected as a direct consequence of computer error? As many of these people are old-age pensioners or on extremely low incomes, this is a serious situation. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that any hardship affecting them is addressed as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Burt: I am aware of the correspondence that the hon. Gentleman has had with my Department. It is important to put this matter into context: some 250 million transactions are produced by computer in the benefits system every year, and 94 per cent. of all benefits are paid right—and right first time. If errors are identified, we do a trawl to find out who else might have been affected. The hon. Gentleman might like to know that the trawl of cases similar to that of his constituent was completed last week. The preliminary figures identify some 11,500 cases that have been affected by this type of error. Benefits will be corrected, and compensation is payable in certain circumstances if there have been delays. We try to ensure that all systems are brought up to date, and there are regular audits to try to ensure that errors do not occur. However, when they happen—no system is foolproof—we take all steps possible to put matters right.

Sir David Madel: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Child Support Agency continues to make computer errors when it sends out demands? In particular, will he ask the agency to be careful not to mix up overtime and basic wages? It often makes errors in that area.

Mr. Burt: As we know, the calculation of child support is complex, and it must be done correctly. I shall draw the attention of the Minister concerned to the point raised by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Alan Howarth: What consideration has the Minister given to the consequences of computer errors if he carries through his intention to sell lists of benefit claimants to private sector organisations, as reported in *The Daily Telegraph* of 15 May? Would it not be a gross breach of confidence to do so? Is it not an error of judgment on the part of Ministers to expose people in poverty to the temptations and taunts of advertisers? Will the Minister give hon. Members his assurance that the Benefits Agency database of clients will not be made available to outside organisations or to individuals, except for purposes that are intrinsic to—and confined to—the administration of benefits?

Mr. Burt: We never had any intention of doing any such thing, and the hon. Gentleman might have been better advised to raise the question elsewhere so that I did not need to tell him that in such a public forum.

Asylum Seekers

3. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the annual cost of social security payments to asylum seekers. [36958]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): If I had not introduced the changes to benefits for asylum seekers in February, it is estimated that the cost would soon have exceeded £400 million a year. Our changes will save more than £270 million, but we will continue to spend just over £140 million a year supporting asylum seekers.

Mr. Marshall: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the types of abuse of the system that many of us have come to expect from asylum seekers? One came to see me on Saturday and thought that she was eligible for housing benefit of £240 a week, or £12,480 a year. Is that reasonable? Is it not right that the Government have stamped down on such unjustified claims? Is it not irresponsible of the Opposition to have opposed that? Is not that yet another new danger from new Labour?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It was only sensible to take the measures that we have taken to prevent the waste of large sums of public money on supporting bogus asylum seekers. The Opposition are grossly irresponsible in pledging to restore that money: they will have to find that £300 million elsewhere in the social security budget—they will take money away from British citizens who are genuine claimants to give to bogus claimants from abroad.

Mr. Gapes: Will the Secretary of State give careful consideration this coming winter to any representations he may receive from Churches, organisations running night shelters and organisations providing support to the destitute that might lead him to introduce new proposals to deal with the outrageous changes he has introduced which have brought hardship to so many men, women and children?

Mr. Lilley: Of course I will consider carefully any representations I receive from any quarter, especially those the hon. Gentleman mentioned. I draw comfort from the fact that the frightening prognostications that were made when my policies were introduced have not materialised—I do not believe they will materialise. Claimants who are found to be genuine at the end of the process will have their benefits backdated, so that those who support asylum seekers they know to be genuine will have their costs reimbursed.

Mrs. Roe: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if total social security spending is not to rise, any increase in spending on asylum seekers would have to be balanced by lower benefits for British citizens? Since the Labour party now claims that it would not increase the total social security budget, will my right hon. Friend tell the House whether the Labour party has told him how it would pay for the extra spending on asylum seekers that it proposes and which British benefits it would cut to pay for it?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The dilemma she points out is exactly that faced by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who has pledged to restore those benefits. He has had the rug pulled from under him by his leader, who has let it be known in *The Daily Telegraph* that he agrees with me and not with his spokesman. An interesting article by Boris Johnson states:

"What was the Blair view of Peter Lilley's attempt to crack down on bogus asylum-seekers? Was he outraged like the *Guardian* editorialists. . . Did he condemn"

them?

"Far from it."

He continues—with words attributed by a Labour source to the Labour leader:

"'I think Peter Lilley makes a lot of sense. . . it's a bit much all these people saying they won't be a charge on the state, and then claiming asylum when they get here.' The moment he sees daylight between himself and the Tories, Blair closes the gap."

Personal Pensions

4. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his power to determine the levels of fees and charges levied by providers of personal pensions. [36959]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald): We have always made it clear that competition and disclosure are the preferred means of ensuring that charges levied are not excessive. We have no plans to use the powers referred to.

Mr. Cunningham: Given that £16 billion is paid out every year in pension rebates—£4 billion of which goes on fees and charges—and that the people that are most affected are the poorer in society, when will the Minister do something about the 25 per cent. charge?

Mr. Heald: There are 5.6 million people with personal pensions in Britain, and 99 per cent. of them are as well off—or better off—as if they had remained in the state earnings-related pension scheme, typically by up to £1,000 a year on their pension at today's prices. That is not my view, but the view of the Securities and Investments Board. What is more, in its recent report, "Disclosure: One Year On", the Personal Investment Authority suggests that competition and disclosure are

working, and that there is evidence of lower charges and better surrender values. The Government's policy is working, and there are no plans to introduce powers of the sort that have been referred to.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my hon. Friend take time during the summer recess, like the Select Committee on Social Security, to go to Chile to see how state-approved personalised pension schemes that are funded really work to provide both a very high level of benefit in retirement and an engine for growth, which has been sustained at over 6 per cent. per annum over the past few years?

Mr. Heald: Like the Select Committee, my right hon. Friend is considering visiting Chile to see the progress that has been made there. We should not forget that, in the United Kingdom, £600 billion is invested in private pension provision. That gives a much better future for people in this country than would otherwise be the case.

Income Support

5. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of children are in households dependent on income support; and, as a percentage of total children, how this compares with 1979. [36960]

Mr. Burt: In Great Britain, 25.6 per cent. of children are members of families where income support is claimed. A direct comparison with 1979 is not possible.

Mr. Hutton: I thought that the Minister would say that a comparison was not possible. Is it not clear that such a shameful figure reveals the extent of the failure of the Government's economic and social policies since 1979? Will the Minister take the opportunity now to apologise to the millions of families and children who have been so badly let down by the policies that the Government have pursued?

Mr. Burt: A direct comparison is not possible because of the different structure of the benefits involved. The hon. Gentleman's point about the number of children in receipt of income-related benefits reflects, first, a rise in unemployment, which was not experienced by the United Kingdom alone, and, secondly, a change in the structure of families.

The Government's response has been to work hard to reduce unemployment, which is why unemployment has decreased so spectacularly in this country. Our unemployment record is much better than those of our partners in Europe. Secondly, in terms of family structure, we have done all that we can through the benefit system to encourage people into work, and to ensure that there is a benefit structure that assists lone parents to get back into work and finds ways of encouraging people to look after themselves. That is the proper response of government.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is something sick and sad about people who do not realise that the take-home money that has been available since 1979—to people from all grades and of all standards—has increased substantially, and that that includes the moneys available to those on benefit? The sadness is that the more we help people, the more we are chastised.

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend makes a more than valid point. Average income has increased for all family types since 1979. When a substantial survey was last conducted of couples on income support with children, it was found that they were 19 per cent. better off under our benefits than under those of the Labour Government.

Mr. Wicks: The Minister says that there is no comparison with 1979. The Library informs me, however, that, in 1979, 7 per cent. of children were dependent on means-tested benefits, whereas 26 per cent. are now. Does not the fact that one in four children are dependent on means-tested benefits show the Government's neglect of Britain's children? Given that, in 1979, Conservatives promised to reduce dependency on the state, will the Minister tell us what has gone wrong?

Mr. Burt: It seems that the hon. Gentleman was not listening to the earlier exchanges. There is no valid comparison, because of differences in benefits. The Government have tried to reduce dependency by getting people back into work and altering the benefit structure to ensure that people go from welfare into work. That is something that the hon. Gentleman should support. It is in direct contrast to the Labour party's policy of work to welfare, first by cutting child benefit for 16 and 17-year-olds and, secondly, by introducing a minimum wage, which would reduce the job opportunities of many families and make their children much poorer.

Mr. Thurnham: Is the Minister aware that, in France, child benefit can be withdrawn in cases where children persistently truant from school? Will he bear that in mind when considering any new proposals for paying child benefit?

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I understand that the provision in France is rarely used. The Department for Education and Employment and local authorities work extremely hard, through their welfare officers, to ensure that children appreciate the benefits of, and the need for going to, school. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that it would be a shame if, as children approach further education at the age of 16, they faced a Labour Government who would take child benefit away from them.

Reduced Earnings Allowances

6. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received about changes in reduced earnings allowances. [36961]

14. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has had in relation to the implementation of the reduced earnings allowance rule. [36969]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): A number of hon. Members have written to Ministers about these changes.

Ms Quin: Does the Minister appreciate the distress and hardship that has been caused to many people who have come to rely on this allowance? In my constituency surgery, male pensioners have broken down in tears as a result of the changes. At the very least, could not some transitional help be made available to such people?

Mr. Evans: I fully appreciate and accept the argument that those who have had the benefit altered are affected adversely by that and are not happy with it, but the position is clear. Reduced earnings allowance is to compensate for reduced earnings, and retirement allowance is to compensate for a reduced retirement pension. The intention of Parliament in 1988 was that, when people passed pension age and ceased to be in regular employment, they passed from one allowance to the other, but the way in which the rules operated were arbitrary and unfair, and a number of people who, for excellent reasons, under the arrangements as they were, have lost reduced earnings allowance and passed to retirement allowance, might fairly complain that some have gained and that they have lost. We have made the scheme reasonable and consistent.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Minister agree that British citizens such as my constituent, Reg Beck, had the right to expect that, when they were told that they would receive reduced earnings allowance for life, that meant for life—not that it would suddenly be cut off in March 1996 by this gimcrack and mean legislative change?

Mr. Evans: Reduced earnings allowance should never have been awarded for life. There are only two circumstances in which that can have happened.

Mr. Flynn: What did the Minister say on "Welsh Lobby"?

Mr. Evans: I shall come to "Welsh Lobby" in a moment.

One is when a party had retired before pensionable age and, due to the defects in the rules, could never thereafter pass from one allowance to the other. A number of persons in that category have been so notified. We are also aware of a small number of cases in which the Benefits Agency has erred. There is a scheme for compensation for official error if financial loss can be shown to have arisen directly from it.

Mr. Harry Greenway: I welcome the scheme announced by my hon. Friend for rectifying official errors, but does he agree that on this question the Opposition are shedding crocodile tears? When will he take into account their intention, if they are ever elected, to get rid of child benefit for children between the ages of 16 and 18? As always, they say one thing and do another.

Madam Speaker: Order. Supplementary questions must relate directly to the main question. This is a serious issue.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Minister aware that I have in my hand a letter from his Department to a constituent of mine giving a categorical assurance in black and white that he would receive reduced earnings allowance for life, and that he, like countless others, has undertaken his financial planning on that basis? Given what the Minister has said, and what has been said on the "Welsh Lobby" programme, will he now give an undertaking that everyone, but everyone, who has been losing money under the changes will now receive compensation for those losses?

Mr. Evans: Ministers have made it clear that each case that is put to us will be looked at most carefully. [HON. MEMBERS: "What does that mean?"] It means that we shall examine what was said and, if there is a proper basis for saying that the Benefits Agency has made an official error and that there has been reliance upon it, there is a scheme for compensation, but each case will be looked at on its merits.

Mr. Bradley: May I press the Minister further on that point? Did he say on television that, where the reduced earnings allowance has caused hardship, he will review those cases? What criteria will he use to do that? What level of hardship must have applied? How much money will he put forward to ensure that hardship can be alleviated for the hundreds of people who budgeted to receive the reduced earnings allowance for the rest of their lives?

Mr. Evans: Some 4 million files are in the process of being looked through and carefully reconsidered, because the test as to whether someone received one allowance or the other after retirement was not working properly under the old regulations. We estimate that about 2,500 people, to whom compensation in the region of about £10 million will be paid, were wrongly transferred under the old arrangements from one allowance to retirement allowance. Every case will be looked at to see whether that happened.

There are, however, a small number of cases—I stress that it is a small number of cases to our knowledge—where, wrongly or because of an unusual application in certain circumstances of the old regulations, people have grounds for concern that they were promised in writing that they would receive the reduced earnings allowance for life. There is a well-established scheme for compensation if official error can be shown and it can be shown that financial loss has arisen as a result.

The interesting question, which the hon. Gentleman did not address, is that the cost of reversing the new regulations would be £25 million this year, and £35 million next year and thereafter. Has the Labour party pledged to alter these changes?

Private Pensions

7. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he last met representatives of the private pensions sector to discuss improvements in private pension provision. [36962]

Mr. Lilley: Earlier this month, I addressed two conferences about pensions, and I have frequent contacts with representatives of the pensions industry.

Mr. Dunn: When my right hon. Friend next meets representatives of the industry, will he tell them that the Government have no plans whatever to nationalise private pension funds or to seek to control them in any way as an aid to state spending? That is the policy of the Labour party, and it is another example of new Labour, new danger, new nightmare for pensioners.

Mr. Lilley: I shall certainly pass on the points that my hon. Friend makes. He is quite right to say that the Opposition have flirted closely with the Singapore scheme, which involves the state running pension

schemes, to the great disadvantage of pensioners in Singapore, whose return since 1980 was only 2 per cent. a year above inflation, whereas private pensions in this country have returned nearly 10 per cent. a year on top of inflation.

Mr. Rogers: Private pensions are all right for people who can afford them. Is the Secretary of State aware that some of my colleagues and I met a group of miners today—some of them amputees—who were disabled early in their careers, that their wages dropped considerably and, as a result, they have spent a lifetime on a very low income? They could not make any provision for retirement and private pensions. They relied on a Government undertaking that they would receive a special hardship allowance as a result of the injuries that they suffered, and that translated into a reduced earnings allowance. The Government have betrayed those people, who have acted in good faith and given great service to this country.

Mr. Lilley: I met some miners myself in Scotland when I was there, and they put their case with impressive eloquence and moderation. I endeavoured to explain, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary did, that we are simply fulfilling the original intention of Parliament. When, during their working lives, people are incapacitated by injury, they receive a reduced earnings allowance, as the name suggests; when they retire, they receive a reduced retirement pension to match the fact that they were unable to contribute as much into funds as they would if they had been working all the time. That is a fair and sensible system, but it was misapplied. We have merely put it back to what Parliament always intended.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the best improvements that we could make to the personal pension regime to encourage more people to opt for such pensions would be the introduction of a minimum contribution for tax relief, regardless of earnings? That would greatly benefit the self-employed, people on low incomes and, I dare say, those to whom the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) referred. My right hon. Friend may say that this is a matter for our right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but his encouragement would be a great help.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right: this is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor when he considers his Budget. I know that he has received representations on the subject. As it overlaps with my responsibilities, however, I will certainly discuss it with him.

Mr. Denham: Instead of scaremongering about plans that he knows the Labour party does not have, will the Secretary of State face up to the reality of personal pensions? Will he confirm that it is eight years since so-called appropriate personal pensions were first on sale? Is it not a scandal that, eight years later, according to the Government Actuary, at least 30 per cent. of the savings of a typical woman with a typical personal pension will be lost in fees and charges by the time she retires?

Is not that typical of the Tories and their privatisation of the welfare state? Is not the message clear? The Government are prepared to pour savers' and taxpayers' money down the drain. Only a Labour Government will provide security in retirement with that money, instead of pouring it down the drain.

Mr. Lilley: We have arranged a system that gives people the option of remaining in SERPS if their circumstances make that more attractive. If, as in the majority of cases, they can do as well or better outside SERPS, they are encouraged to opt out of it and to build up funded personal and occupational pensions totalling some £600 billion, to the great benefit of the country. That means that, in advance of people's retirement, we have saved more funds than all the other European countries put together. The hon. Gentleman may regret that deeply—I know that he does—but the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has said that the Labour party wants to remove SERPS. In May this year, he wrote, "SERPS must go."

Occupational Pensions

8. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to improve the regulation of occupational pensions. [36963]

Mr. Heald: The Pensions Act 1995 will improve security for occupational pension scheme members and increase confidence in private pension provision, but without imposing undue burdens on employers or schemes.

Mrs. Lait: Can my hon. Friend confirm that, during the Bill's passage last year, Labour Members tabled more than 700 amendments, the bulk of which would have increased regulation of occupational pensions? Does he agree that that burdensome and over-regulatory approach constitutes yet another new danger from new Labour?

Mr. Heald: As usual, my hon. Friend is right. In fact, Labour Members tabled not 700 but 740 amendments, most of which would have added to regulation. In the debate the other night, they were doing it again—proposing further regulations. There is danger in this. Over-regulation can put employers off setting up schemes and continuing with them. New Labour, new danger.

Mr. Clapham: The Minister will be aware that, although salary-based schemes provide a minimum pension, the new money purchase schemes that many people have been encouraged to join since 1988 do not. What steps is he taking to improve the benefits provided by contracted-out money purchase schemes?

Mr. Heald: All forms of private pension provision have something to recommend them in individual cases. Salary-related schemes provide excellent benefits and, for some people, so do money purchase schemes, which have the advantage of being more flexible. The Government's policy has been to encourage such flexibility while providing the security that pensioners need if they are to have confidence in the system. The rebates announced earlier this year build on that. Let us not forget that the Labour party is talking about introducing schemes run by trade unions, which would undermine what the Government have done, and involve a guaranteed minimum pension that would cost up to £5 billion and a flexible decade of retirement costing £15 billion.

Welfare Support

9. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his policy in respect of providing support for those who most need assistance. [36964]

Mr. Burt: Our policy is to focus benefits on those who need them most by improving incentives, bearing down on abuse and encouraging personal responsibility.

Mr. Viggers: A number of my constituents have complained to me about the generosity of benefits paid to those whom they describe as professional claimants, compared with the meagre benefits available to those who have worked all their lives and have become unemployed for the first time. Does my hon. Friend recognise that contrast, does he think that it is fair, and what further action can the Government take to improve the situation?

Mr. Burt: Under present legislation, and under the jobseeker's allowance scheme, the Employment Service works hard to distinguish between those who should be entitled to unemployment and income-related benefits and those who for their own reasons have chosen not to work or to avoid interviews and the like. I assure my hon. Friend that we take this matter seriously. It is important that benefit is paid to those who need it and who have not done anything to put themselves out of the labour market. The new jobseeker's allowance will help in that cause.

Mr. Frank Field: The Government's targeting of benefits means that families who work are penalised, families who save are penalised, and families who tell the truth are penalised. Are the Government proud of the fact that they have doubled the number of families on means-tested assistance, up to one in three of the population?

Mr. Burt: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's premises for a moment. The work that we have done to increase earnings-related benefit, work-related benefit, means that a family in work on family credit are £23 a week better off than if they were on income-related benefit. We have tried to improve the benefits system to make sure that it is worth going into work. Many of the changes announced by the Chancellor a couple of years ago which come into effect this year—earnings top-up and the like—will benefit 750,000 people. That is the right way to set about the problem.

Mr. Churchill: Given the massive scale of social security fraud, when will the Government introduce a national system of workfare for all able-bodied unemployed so as to guarantee them an income while at the same time smoking out those who make multiple fraudulent claims or who are already employed but also drawing benefit?

Mr. Burt: The issue of workfare is more a matter for the Department for Education and Employment. First, as I said earlier, the new system of jobseeker's allowance should distinguish rather better between those who want to work and those who choose for some reason not to work. Secondly, the measures that we have introduced this year, particularly earnings top-up, still try to find a way to boost the income of those who have just come off benefit so as to make work more attractive. We persist in believing that that is the best way forward.

Ms Lynne: Does the Minister accept that axing the benefits helpline will cause untold hardship to benefit claimants, especially pensioners, who often do not claim what they are due? Will he reconsider the decision, or does he expect organisations such as the citizens advice bureaux and Age Concern to fill the gap?

Mr. Burt: No, it is not a question of that. Local Benefits Agency offices now provide a great deal of support and information for people looking for information about their benefits. All too often, callers to the national helpline had to be redirected to the local Benefits Agency office line, and we prefer that to be the process. The benefits inquiry line, which is specifically designed for queries about disability benefits, remains in place. We have substantially boosted the amount of information that is made available through the Benefits Agency and this good policy will continue.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Will my hon. Friend confirm that since 1988 we are spending an extra £1.2 billion on less well-off families and that to claim that more people on means-tested benefits equals increased poverty is a complete distortion of the truth, because in fact it demonstrates that we are helping more and more people in need?

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend is correct. The changes in benefits in 1988 enabled us to redirect £1 billion a year to the poorest families. The Opposition should not criticise that. In contrast with all the difficult decisions that we have made and all the decisions to redirect benefits and target them more effectively, there has been nothing constructive from the Opposition—merely a series of reviews and attempts to think the unthinkable. The Opposition have produced nothing workable, only dissent. It is another example of a party not really ready to govern.

Mr. Chris Smith: Can the Minister tell us how it can possibly have helped those in need for his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to have talks about the disposal of DSS offices, as he is reported to have done on 21 February, with Mr. John Beckwith, chairman of the Premier Club, who is usually employed drumming up money in return for the dubious privilege of meeting the Prime Minister? Will the Minister tell us whether such a meeting took place, and will he now rule out Mr. Beckwith's participation in any such disposal?

Mr. Burt: In the past four or five minutes the House has had a sensible discussion about the targeting of benefits. It is a shame that the hon. Gentleman cannot rise to the quality of that discussion.

Disability Living Allowance

10. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the impact of changes in the mobility components of disability living allowance on care of residents in residential and retirement homes. [36965]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Andrew Mitchell): The changes will affect only people who for benefit purposes are treated as hospital in-patients—that is, where the NHS is responsible for maintaining them free of charge, regardless of where they are receiving treatment.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister accept that one of the privileges of old age is the ability to get out and about? People may be in residential homes because of their age and yet qualify for mobility allowance. Why should they not be allowed to get out and about rather than be prisoners in those homes?

Mr. Mitchell: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but I must emphasise that the measure that he has raised brings disability living allowance, mobility, into line with disability living allowance, care. Also, attendance allowance would stop after four weeks in hospital or after 12 weeks for children. It is usual for social security benefits to be withdrawn or downrated when a person goes into hospital.

Sir Donald Thompson: Will my hon. Friend discuss with his right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Health the way in which local authorities are manipulating those benefits and old people to the disadvantage of those old people by ensuring that they do not go into private residential homes, but block beds until they can go into the vastly more expensive local authority homes?

Mr. Mitchell: I will pass on my hon. Friend's comments. I must emphasise that the changes are about targeting disability living allowance, mobility, and not about cutting disability benefits. We now spend about £21 billion on sick and disabled people, and that is a record of which the Government can be very proud.

Back-to-work Bonus

11. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to introduce a back-to-work bonus. [36966]

Mr. Lilley: We shall be introducing a back-to-work bonus in the jobseeker's allowance and income support from 7 October. This will allow an estimated 150,000 people per year to receive a tax-free lump sum of up to £1,000 when they leave benefit to take up work.

Mr. Waterson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is just one of a number of excellent proposals to help people off welfare and into work? Does he agree that the national minimum wage would have the opposite effect by destroying jobs? Is that not just another example of new Labour, new danger?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is quite right. This is one of an array of imaginative measures to get people off benefit and into work. Almost all the measures proposed by the Labour party—such as the minimum wage and the social chapter, which would destroy jobs—are means of getting people out of work and on to benefit.

Madam Speaker: I call Mr. Skinner.

Mr. Skinner: The Minister is not ready. *[Interruption.]* That is better.

Is it true that the Government, worried by all the ministerial resignations, plan to introduce a back-to-work bonus for Ministers who resign, or will they have to settle for a reduced earnings allowance? Ministers are to get severance pay while the rest of the workers have it taken away from them.

Mr. Lilley: I am sorry that I nearly missed participating in the Lilley and Skinner show. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are more interested in the serious business of getting people back into real jobs than making petty party political points.

Lone Parents

12. **Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the Australian JET—jobs education and training—scheme in respect of helping lone parents out of dependency. [36967]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I have examined the Australian JET scheme. We shall be basing our scheme—to be piloted from next April—on more successful models.

Mr. Thomason: Can my hon. Friend confirm that the JET scheme is inefficient and costly, but it is close to the heart of the Opposition? Perhaps it is an example of yet another new danger. Has my hon. Friend looked at other schemes in other parts of the world?

Mr. Mitchell: Yes. The Opposition have backed the wrong horse. In their lust for glib soundbites, they overlooked the detail. The Australian JET scheme overstates savings and understates the costs involved. They should look to the GAIN—greater avenues for independence—scheme in California if they want the taxpayer to save money through a scheme that is effective in getting people back to work. From next April, the Government will be piloting a state of the art scheme that will have learnt from other schemes around the world and will be successful and effective in helping lone parents back to work.

PRIME MINISTER

Lichfield

Q1. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Prime Minister what analysis he has made of the effect of the Government's social and economic policies on the people of Lichfield; and if he will make statement. [36986]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): Lichfield has benefited fully from Government policies which have given the United Kingdom a stronger recovery than any comparable European country, the longest run of low inflation for 50 years and the lowest mortgage rates for a generation. Unemployment in Lichfield has fallen by 40 per cent. in the past three years.

Mr. Fabricant: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Is he aware that businesses in Lichfield are experiencing real problems due to the postal strike? Has

he been deafened, as I have, by the absolute silence from Opposition Front-Bench Members, who have refused to condemn the postal strike? Might that be because the Communications Workers Union has contributed some £250,000 to Labour party coffers?

The Prime Minister: The strikes last week were completely unjustified, and I hope that future plans for industrial action will be called off before more damage is done. My hon. Friend is right to point out that the sponsored silence by Opposition Members continues on this matter. *[Interruption.]* The deputy leader does not have a sponsored silence this afternoon, nor did he last week when he apparently told his leader to backtrack on what he had said in public—which is no doubt what the right hon. Gentleman was doing when he met the unions yesterday.

Mr. Brian David Jenkins: Can the Prime Minister confirm for the 20,000 residents of Lichfield district who live in my constituency that, under the Tory Government, crime has risen by 147 per cent., education funding from central Government is the lowest in any shire district in England and residential mental health care is being closed for lack of funds? Moreover, when those 20,000 people were given the opportunity to vote in the recent South-East Staffordshire by-election they overwhelmingly turned to new Labour: new life for Britain.

The Prime Minister: I am sorry to hear the hon. Gentleman make that devastating attack on the spending policies of the shadow Chancellor, who has made it perfectly clear that it is not his policy to spend any more money than the present Government. The hon. Gentleman had better discuss his own difficulties with his own Front-Bench spokesmen. As for crime, it is falling throughout the country and has been falling for some time—the first time that that has happened for a long period. No doubt it might have been easier to achieve that if we had occasionally had the support of Opposition parties for the measures that we adopted.

Engagements

Q2. **Dr. Goodson–Wickes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 July. [36987]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Dr. Goodson–Wickes: Does my right hon. Friend welcome the recent call by the chief executive of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority for the teaching of modern British history to be reinstated for GCSE? Does he further agree that any open-minded student will come to the conclusion that over the years socialism has done this country a great disservice, and that history would be likely to repeat itself should new Labour ever get the chance to implement new dangers?

The Prime Minister: I certainly agree that young people should have the opportunity to study the history of this country, and I hope that the examination boards will be aware of the popular concern among many parents on that subject. Whether students study British history or world history, I think that they will see that policies of high regulation, high spending and high taxes have consistently failed, and that, when people are asked to make a choice between a party that believes in low taxes and one that believes in high taxes, they will choose low taxes yet again at the 1997 election.

Mr. Blair: With all due respect to the Prime Minister, I think that people will remember that they were supposed to have chosen low taxes at the last election, but then got the largest peacetime taxes in history. Can the right hon. Gentleman answer the following question with an unequivocal yes? Does he agree with his Chancellor's recent statement that he can see circumstances in which he would recommend that Britain join a single currency during the next Parliament?

The Prime Minister: We have made the position on a single currency entirely clear. I shall make a judgment on what is in this country's national interests, which means that we shall need to know the circumstances of the time, and precisely what a single currency would mean for this country. We need to be engaged in the debate right until its conclusion, whether or not we enter. If we did not enter, a single currency would still have an effect on this country, so it is still important that Britain's voice be heard in the negotiations until they are concluded.

Mr. Blair: Why could the Prime Minister not simply answer yes to my question? After all, I am only asking him to agree with his own Chancellor of the Exchequer. Does not his response show precisely the paralysis of policy? Let me offer him another chance. Can he, like his Chancellor, see circumstances in which he would recommend that Britain join a single currency during the next Parliament—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can tell the House whether he agrees with the argumentation in the pamphlet that I have here—a pamphlet produced by Labour Members of Parliament which led to Labour Members squabbling in public this morning and denouncing the shadow Chancellor. I have told the right hon. Gentleman what the Government's position is. We have set it out in a White Paper. That is the position, and it has not changed.

Mr. Blair: The Prime Minister asked me whether I agreed with the pamphlet. The answer is no, I do not agree with it. Now let us have a clear answer from him. What sort of situation are we in when a Chancellor of the Exchequer cannot keep his own Ministers, and the Prime Minister's closest political friends are saying that his party cannot row together or work together? Why should the country put up with another nine months of drift and decay? After six years of that type of weak leadership, are not people entitled to say that enough is enough, and that the only reshuffle that matters will be one that reshuffles the Government out of office and gives the country a fresh start?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman may be prepared to commit himself to decisions without the facts that would affect this country. If he will not commit himself to a decision, he had better make up his mind

whether he is in favour. He won't because he can't, because his party is split from top to bottom on the issue. The reality is that we shall consider the facts—not the prejudices, but the realities—and make a decision on what is right for this country.

Mr. Colvin: Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that this Michaelmas the Treasury will be receiving around £1.5 billion from the sale of the armed forces married quarters estate? What excuse is there for the Chancellor to delay the essential announcement on the procurement orders which we all expected before the House rose for the summer recess? He cannot have it both ways. First, does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that we have the best armed forces in the world? Secondly, does he agree with our Secretary of State for Defence that they should also be the best equipped?

The Prime Minister: Of course I agree with my hon. Friend about the quality of the armed forces. I also invite him to agree that we have provided the resources to ensure that our armed forces have the best equipment. He will recall the announcement a week or so ago and the £500 million committed. We are evaluating our assessment of the bids for the various pieces of equipment now due for replacement. When that evaluation is completed, but not before, suitable announcements will be made.

Mr. Ashdown: Let me put it to the Prime Minister another way. At the end of a Parliament which began with the farce of devaluation and ended with the fiasco of BSE, which has seen Tory Members leave their party and Tory Ministers desert their Government, and which has gone from cash for questions to cash for dinners in Downing street, is it not time for the Prime Minister to lead his exhausted and divided party out of power to fight their civil wars somewhere else?

The Prime Minister: I think that in his litany the right hon. Gentleman misses some facts of importance to the British people. He cannot recall an occasion in his political lifetime when the British economy has been in such good shape, when inflation has been so low, when unemployment has been falling so well, when growth has been at the top of the European league and investment is coming into this country as it is coming into no other country in Europe. That is happening because of the policies of this Government—policies that his tiny party has objected to throughout this Parliament.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As next Sunday, 28 July, happens to be the 25th anniversary of my resignation from the then Government over their decision to join the EEC, does the Prime Minister accept that there is growing contempt among the voters for people in all parties who pretend that there are any easy answers to the difficult and complex problems of the European Community? Will he think seriously over the summer recess about the possibility of seeking the advice of the voters of Britain as to which way they wish to proceed on Europe? Would not the best answer to the Opposition be to remind them that the country belongs to the people, not to the political parties?

The Prime Minister: There is no doubt from the Opposition's European policies precisely what they would surrender in the European debate. However they try to hide it, the veto would go and qualified majority voting would increase. They signed up to the socialist manifesto, and the Leader of the Opposition cannot wriggle away from it now. In answer to my hon. Friend's question, of course we shall consider what is in the interests of the United Kingdom. I do that and I shall continue to do that.

Q3. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 July. [36988]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hain: Will the Prime Minister rule out any bid from Mr. John Beckwith for the £1.5 billion sale of defence homes and the £750 million sale of benefit offices, in view of his role in organising Premier Club dinners where business men pay £100,000 to bend the Prime Minister's ear? Is there not a clear conflict of interest between being premier of Great Britain and the right hon. Gentleman's position as patron of the Premier Club?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is wrong on all the facts. I saw the story that interested and misled him. No one can buy access to Ministers. *[Interruption.]* No one is promised favours. *[Interruption.]* There is one exception in public life: it is possible to buy access to Labour party policy through the trade unions; it is possible to buy votes; it was possible to summon the leader of the Labour party to explain his remarks about the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers last week; it is possible to change Labour party policy, but not ours. As regards Mr. Beckwith, any bid is independently assessed before being approved.

Q4. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 July. [36989]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Baker: Will my right hon. Friend condemn from the Dispatch Box the politically motivated strikes by London underground drivers and postal workers? Will he confirm that he has no plans to introduce legislation to give trade unions increased powers or to increase the powers of strikers, which is precisely what is on offer from the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right about that. The deputy leader of the Labour party talks about £100,000. Perhaps he will remind the country how much the union that sponsors him pays to the Labour party year after year. Perhaps he will explain that that is why he will not condemn a totally unjustified strike. Perhaps he will explain that not one of the candidates in the shadow Cabinet elections will condemn the strike. If they were standing for election to a Trappist monastery, they could not have been more silent than they have been on the subject of the strike. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) knows that the Labour party's relationship with the trade unions is a disgrace to British democracy: they rule, and the Labour party follows.

BILL PRESENTED

RIGHT TO WORK

Sir Ralph Howell, supported by Mr. Frank Field, Mr. David Alton, Sir Wyn Roberts, Mr. David Howell, Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith, Sir Rhodes Boyson, Mr. Michael Alison, Ms Angela Eagle, Sir Anthony Grant, Mr. Hugh Dykes and Mr. Bob Dunn, presented a Bill to establish the right to work and to impose a duty on the Secretary of State to offer work instead of benefit to persons who would otherwise be without work in the United Kingdom; to establish a system of grants to certain parents; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 15 October and to be printed. [Bill 186.]

NORTHERN IRELAND GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 99(2) (Matter relating exclusively to Northern Ireland).

That the matter of the 35th, 36th, 37th, 38th and 39th reports from the Examiner of Statutory Rules, being a matter relating exclusively to Northern Ireland, be referred to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee for its consideration.—[*Mr. Coe.*]

Question agreed to.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Yesterday, in reply to a point of order from the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), you advised him to seek to pursue the question of hon. Members visiting his constituency without his knowledge in another way, rather than by raising it as a point of order.

I took your advice, following a visit last Friday to my constituency by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces and the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates), who were presenting industry awards to a firm in my constituency. Neither hon. Member informed me that he was coming. Their visit was accompanied by much publicity.

I took the matter up with the Ministry of Defence, which informed me that the Minister was not on official business but on a Tory party central office visit. Is it in order for a Minister of the Crown to parade himself around the country, at the behest of central office, giving the impression that he is acting in an official capacity, without informing the Member concerned? That is a double disgrace.

Madam Speaker: My only concern is that a Member or Minister should go to another hon. Member's constituency without the courtesy of giving notice. It is my opinion that the hon. Gentleman should have been given notice of the Member or Minister going to his constituency. That is my responsibility, and I try to uphold it.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I recall that it is also an important courtesy of the House that, if one hon. Member intends to mention another hon. Member, he should give notice. The hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) did not give me notice, and I suspect that he did not give notice to my hon. Friends the Members for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates) and for Crawley (Mr. Soames).

Madam Speaker: The point of order did not relate to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Hughes *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. It is time that hon. Members took their buckets and spades and went off on holiday, if this is all that they can do.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will recall that you signed the Votes and Proceedings of yesterday's business. Item 8 was a Government motion relating to European Community water policy, to which I and two of my hon. Friends moved an amendment that, unusually, was selected—no doubt because it related to the debate Upstairs.

As you will know, under Standing Order No. 102, no debate is allowed on such amendments, even when they are selected. If the amendment had been accepted, it would have had important implications for the European Community and its procedures. Can you tell me whether

representations to change that Standing Order should be made through you to the Procedure Committee, by means of an early-day motion or by letters to the Procedure Committee? There is widespread concern about the way in which we handle these matters.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): Now that is a point of order.

Madam Speaker: It certainly is a point of order, because the hon. Member for Newham, South knows well our proceedings in the House, follows them carefully and makes proper points of order. I think he is aware—if not, I inform him and the House of this most interesting and important point—that the Procedure Committee is at present examining all these matters. The report will be produced as soon as possible.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Could I ask your guidance on a matter of order relating to the subject of the Opposition debate this afternoon? I presume that the subject was originally precipitated by what was thought to be the leak of a Government document. As it now transpires that the leaked document was produced by a Labour prospective candidate, have you had any representations about changing the subject of the debate this afternoon?

Madam Speaker: No, I have not had any such representations. The debate is on the motion as outlined on the Order Paper.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Before we go away with our buckets and spades, is there any way in which we can obtain a statement from the Ministry of Defence about the replacement maritime patrol aircraft? Up to 200 jobs at British Aerospace at Prestwick depend on the decision, and the fear is that it is being delayed to enable the Chancellor to give some pre-election tax cut bribe. That is undermining the position of jobs at Prestwick. Can you force a statement before we go away tomorrow?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is well aware that I cannot force the Government to make a statement, but he should also be aware that there will be an opportunity in a debate tomorrow for him to raise the matter and obtain a response. I am sure that, if he looks at tomorrow's Order Paper, he will find a method of doing that.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. For many years, it was the practice in the House not to name civil servants who could not defend themselves on the Floor of the House. While I understand that a determined attempt by the previous Prime Minister to politicise the civil service has led many civil servants to believe that they have a different role, is it not deplorable that hon. Members should denigrate in the House those who do not have a right to defend themselves?

Madam Speaker: I have always held firmly to the view that those who do not have a platform on which to defend themselves in the House should not be named by hon. Members in that way. I have tried to uphold that principle, and I hope that it will continue.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As you have overall responsibility for the papers of the House, could I ask you to be kind enough to speak to those who vet the wording of motions, and ask them to ensure that sloppy phrases such as "knee-jerk opposition" do not occur in official motions again?

Madam Speaker: The point has been taken, Sir Patrick.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. While I am sure that all of us agree with the general principle that one should not refer to civil servants who do not have a right to defend themselves in the House, surely the action of the Opposition Front-Bench team in bringing the matter before the House has brought it into the public domain?

Madam Speaker: I have made my views known on that.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. This is like zero hour in India. I do not believe that hon. Members have genuine points of order, but think of them at the last moment.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): On a genuine point of order, Madam Speaker. Many of us tabled questions to the Chancellor for Thursday in good faith, on the understanding that there had been an announcement and there would be business on Thursday. We are suddenly given notice that we are to be deprived of that opportunity to question the Chancellor or to ask him to answer the charges. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) has just defamed a civil servant, and we now have no opportunity to set the record right. As my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said, it is a gross discourtesy to the House and to the civil servant.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman, and perhaps many more like him, will have to wait until October. I hope that he can keep his cool until then.

Waste Prevention

3.40 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to enable certain local authorities to investigate what measures are needed to reduce, prevent or avoid waste in their area; to take such steps as they consider appropriate in order to achieve that end; and for related purposes.

Reducing waste can make good economic as well as environmental sense, not just for the country, but for industries and individual companies. Nowhere has that imperative been set out more clearly than by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales in their foreword to the Government's White Paper, "Making Waste Work", a strategy for sustainable waste management, published in December last year. They presented the central message:

"more sustainable waste practices need not entail great expense or restrictive legislation. Indeed they can bring substantial savings to business. We can achieve a long-term sustainable balance between the environmental and economic impacts of different waste management options and feel the benefits now."

The theme of the Bill is in tune with that approach, as it certainly does not involve great expense or restrictive legislation. On the contrary, it contains enabling powers that are intended to encourage waste collection authorities to adopt a proactive stance in their dealings with both the domestic and commercial sectors in their areas.

Co-operation between local authorities and local industry is essential. I am in a fortunate position, as a waste minimisation project has been established, which is being led by the Keighley Business Forum. The forum has been described as

"a dynamic self-help group of 360 companies whose key aims are to regenerate the local business economy and improve performance."

In March this year, it succeeded with a skills challenge bid for its initial project involving 23 companies, both large and small. The bid won a special merit award as one of the six best schemes in the country.

As the forum points out, individual companies are unlikely to have the management skills, systems, resources or technical knowledge to achieve the full benefits in terms of environmental improvements and energy efficiency savings of waste minimisation. At least a further 40 companies are expected to participate in its forthcoming expanded scheme, demonstrating the keen interest that exists in this field. It has already been found that the cross-fertilisation of ideas and approaches is one of the greatest benefits to be obtained.

The waste saving project managed by the forum has gained the support of the Yorkshire and Humberside Government office, the BOC Foundation, the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Water, Bradford council, and Bradford and district training and enterprise council. It is also linked to Keighley's successful bid for funding from the single regeneration budget, which has the potential to create many new jobs in the town, as well as greatly improving the infrastructure and environment.

In the first phase of the project, a series of nine half-day seminars will take place between September and December this year on a range of different techniques of waste minimisation, including analysing the potential for saving within the production process, better planned maintenance, avoiding unnecessary use of gas and electricity, and taking advantage of opportunities in terms of the recycling and disposal of hard waste, water and effluents.

From that point, with the aid of specialised consultants, companies will be able to carry out waste minimisation audits, and start to formulate their own action plans. For example, Yorkshire Water will be supporting a pilot programme on water minimisation, and will offer a free water audit to companies participating in the scheme.

The initial cost of taking the first steps along the path of eliminating waste need not be great. Companies can participate in the Keighley business forum's project for as little as £60, and there is the possibility of substantial paybacks in due course. However, success demands the continuing commitment of senior management. The forum has stated:

"Waste management is not a destination but a journey."

The Government have set out clear objectives: to reduce the amount of waste that society produces, and to make the best possible use of it. In this way, we can minimise the risks of immediate and future environment pollution and harm to human health. Targets can often help, and we have set clear and realistic ones: to reduce the proportion of controlled waste going to landfill from 70 per cent. to 60 per cent. by 2005, and to recover value from 40 per cent. of municipal waste by the same date. The worth of efforts to achieve these targets can be better appreciated if we understand that, in England and in Wales, we produce enough waste to fill Lake Windermere every nine months.

Waste reduction is not something that only concerns companies—it concerns all of us as individuals. The Government, in their 1990 White Paper on the environment, set out a household waste target that involves the recycling or composting of a quarter of all household waste by 2000. Among the key factors in achieving that target is joint action by householders and by local authorities. The latter must ensure that bottle banks are available, and must arrange their waste collection and disposal facilities in such a way that material that can be recycled is separated. Many householders are already used to putting recyclable waste into green bins, the contents of which are collected separately.

The Women's Environmental Network, which is supporting me in the drafting of the Bill, has suggested a number of practical ways in which waste saving can be promoted by local authorities: for example, by publicising cheap repair schemes for household items such as vacuum cleaners and washing machines, which may otherwise be disposed of if they go wrong; by persuading local restaurants to cut down on the unnecessary waste of food; by discouraging businesses from producing unnecessary publications and paper; and by finding ways of reducing product packaging.

I stress that waste saving makes good sense: it improves the image of companies, it can increase their income, and it gives individuals a stake in an essential drive towards a more sustainable environment. The Bill sends signals that are right for our time, and I hope that it will be supported.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Gary Waller, Sir Teddy Taylor, Mr. Elliot Morley, Mrs. Diana Maddock, Mr. Cynog Dafis, Sir John Hunt, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Sir David Knox, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Matthew Taylor and Mr. Barry Sheerman.

WASTE PREVENTION

Mr. Gary Waller accordingly presented a Bill to enable certain local authorities to investigate what measures are needed to reduce, prevent or avoid waste in their area; to take such steps as they consider appropriate in order to achieve that end; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Tuesday 15 October and to be printed. [Bill 187.]

Orders of the Day

Opposition Day

[20TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Welfare State

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.48 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I beg to move,

That this House asserts its renewed commitment to a strong welfare state to provide a platform of opportunity and security for all citizens during those times of their lives when they need it; expresses alarm at recent indications that Her Majesty's Government is considering the privatisation of parts of the welfare system; deplores the Government's stewardship of the welfare state, which has left it more expensive for the nation but more brutal for those who rely on it; believes that the way to reduce welfare expenditure is to help people to move from benefit to work, not to remove or reduce their benefits; and fears that the future of the nation's welfare state is not safe in this Government's hands.

This debate is taking place because the Government have failed those who depend on the welfare state and the nation. In a world of increasing insecurity, the need for a strong platform on which we can all depend at the times of our life that we need to is greater than ever. We must modernise the welfare state—make it appropriate for a modern world—and we should not dismantle it. That is the crucial difference between the Labour party and the Conservative party.

The Government's stewardship of the welfare state stands on the record. They have doubled the number of people dependent on state benefits, from one in 12 of the population to one in six.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: So soon?

Mr. Stephen: The hon. Gentleman alleges blithely that we have doubled this and that. Has he not heard that the entire western world has just come through the worst economic recession since 1929, or was that also the fault of the British Government?

Mr. Smith: I notice that the hon. Gentleman and his party are quick to claim credit when the global economy is going well, but rather less quick to claim the blame when it is going badly.

The truth is that twice as many people are dependent on state benefits now as there were when the Government took office in 1979. In addition, they have doubled the amount of means testing in the system: it is up from 16 per cent. of benefit payments to 36 per cent. Now, one in five of all non-pensioner households have no earned income, and that worrying trend—the development of a category of non-earning households—should concern any sensible Government.

[Mr. Smith]

As we learned a few moments ago, one in four of all children grow up in poverty, and, at the same time, the budget for social security across the nation has risen by a third in real terms during the time the Government have been in power.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): How will the hon. Gentleman benefit the families that have 16 to 18-year-olds in further education when their child benefit is removed?

Mr. Smith: There is no such proposal at the moment, and if the hon. Gentleman listened to what the Labour party has said, rather than paying attention solely to his Conservative central office briefing, he might recognise the truth.

Every year, we have grand announcements from the Secretary of State about claimed reductions in expenditure from the uprating statement, and then, every year, he overshoots his departmental budget, often to the tune of several billions of pounds.

On top of all those examples, we see increasing inequality in this country. The Secretary of State tried to tackle that issue in his speech in Southwark cathedral recently. He told us that people who talked about increasing inequality were missing the real picture, and that we were all upwardly mobile now. He said particularly that those at the bottom of the heap were upwardly mobile now. That assertion stands in the same category as his claim to a number of lobbying organisations some months back that there was no poverty in Britain, because it was a problem only for third-world countries.

The Secretary of State based his evidence on a survey carried out by his Department on the work and earnings experience of men aged 29 to 44 in 1978-79, and their contributions history from then until now.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I hope that—in addition to telling us what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in Southwark cathedral—the hon. Gentleman will tell us how the Labour party proposes to reduce social security spending, about which he has complained; how he expects the reduction of means testing, to which he has also referred, to help that process; and how he will pay for the increase in basic pension and the restoration of the link with earnings, as called for by his predecessor as social security spokesman, Baroness Castle. That has been traditional Labour party policy, from which it has resiled.

Mr. Smith: Apart from making the obvious observation that Baroness Castle, dear friend as she is to me, does not make current Labour party policy, the hon. Gentleman might be better off in framing his questions if he reads what we have produced as a party in recent weeks—including, for example, the excellent document entitled "Getting Welfare to Work", which was published some weeks ago. By that means, he might learn something of benefit to him.

In his Southwark cathedral speech, the Secretary of State referred to a departmental survey. That survey excluded women. It excluded also those who were unemployed at the beginning and at the end of the period covered by it. It focused on a particular generation. The survey gave the lie to the broad conclusions that the Secretary of State tried to build upon it. A passage on the first page of the survey reads:

"The findings tell a statistically significant story of the work experiences of a particular group of people, and do not reveal trends in the labour force as a whole."

Yet the Secretary of State attempted to claim in his Southwark cathedral speech that the survey revealed trends in the labour force as a whole.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): The hon. Gentleman has not quoted me. That applies to all his other allegations. He has not presented a single quote to justify them.

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Gentleman said clearly that those of us who have talked about growing poverty and inequality were practising the politics of envy. The tone of his speech was in support of the thesis that inequality does not matter, because it is superseded by mobility. That is what the right hon. Gentleman was saying. If he wants to quibble with my paraphrase of the content of his speech, I am happy to give him the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Lilley: I thought that it would help *Hansard* readers if I gave them a shorter version of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, and were merely to say that I did not say any such thing.

Mr. Smith: The Secretary of State has shot a hole through the entirety of his speech. He was clearly arguing that the evidence of mobility that his departmental survey showed, as he claimed, made it clear that we did not need to worry about inequality. He is now telling us that that is not what he said. The right hon. Gentleman should go through his speech and withdraw it in its entirety.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The hon. Gentleman has no evidence that there is anything like the thought that he suggests is to be found in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends—the shadow social security team—have sent out a document to Labour Back-Bench Members for the debate. On the second page, near the top, it states:

"The secret report reveals that Ministers intend to justify these cuts in services by arguing that 'some of the customers had brought these problems on their own heads, by failing to take any responsibility for dealing with their own problems'".

There is no quote like that, is there? Will the hon. Gentleman confirm to the House that he has simply made it up?

Mr. Smith: I have a copy of the speech made by the Secretary of State. The right hon. Gentleman said what I claimed he said. I refer to a section that is headed "Opposition Approach". It states:

"Indeed, an obsession with equality often displaces concern for poverty by the politics of envy."

That is precisely what I said the Secretary of State was saying. The right hon. Gentleman continued. In another section is headed "Average Incomes Have Risen." He continued by claiming:

"Our policies are working. The vast majority of people in this country are better off now than their counterparts were in 1979."

Another section is headed "Improvements for People in the Bottom Tenth of Incomes". It states:

"It is significant that claims that the 'poor have got poorer' do not generally focus on benefit levels. Instead they largely relate to statistics for households with the lowest tenth of reported incomes."

He goes on to talk about how people in that decile have seen their position become upwardly mobile. Case after case in the Secretary of State's speech supports the paraphrase that I have just made of it. If the Secretary of State wants to intervene to tell me that he did not say the things in the printed text of his speech, I shall happily allow him to do so.

The Department's survey, which excluded women and people who were unemployed at the beginning of the survey period, does not bear out the construction that the Secretary of State put on it. For example, the survey reveals that more than two thirds of those out of work in 1978-79 were still out of work in 1992-93. It shows that less than half of the lowest paid in 1978-79 had climbed into a higher earnings bracket in 1992-93.

The report is specific about the most recent period, under the present Prime Minister, in relation to people at the bottom of the pile. It says:

"Earnings growth over the period varies directly with the decile position, with the highest growth occurring in the upper deciles . . . What growth there was in the lower deciles occurred mainly in the first two thirds of the period"—

back in the 1980s.

"growth in the last third of the period is lower, with no apparent growth at all in the bottom decile".

It is clear from the Department's own study, which the Secretary of State prayed in aid in his speech at Southwark cathedral, that, during the Government's stewardship, the people at the bottom of the pile have seen no apparent growth at all in their incomes and standard of living.

The Government must recognise that inequality and poverty in Britain are real and should not be brushed aside, as they constantly have been by the Government. Not content with having presided over that trend to poverty, inequality and dependency, creating a divided Britain, the Secretary of State is now setting about making it worse.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North) *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but then I must make progress.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman has spent about five minutes attempting to argue that somehow the rich have become richer and the poor poorer. Yet he finished up resting on a phrase tendentiously suggesting that the bottom 10 per cent. are "no better off". That does not mean that they have become dramatically poorer, as the Labour party's propaganda constantly seeks to suggest.

Mr. Smith: First, the phrase that I quoted came from the Secretary of State's own Department's study. Secondly, as I explained at the outset, that study ignored women and those who were unemployed at the beginning and at the end of the survey, so it was a distorted picture anyway. Thirdly, the Joseph Rowntree Trust's report of a year ago showed clearly that the income, after housing costs, of the bottom tenth of the population had fallen by 17 per cent. during the past 17 years. The hon. Gentleman should look more carefully at the figures before he makes such an intervention.

Mr. Stephen *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I shall give way for one last time.

Mr. Stephen: On the subject of distortions, I have in front of me a draft Labour press release which was no doubt left on a photocopier by a prospective Conservative candidate in the hon. Gentleman's office. It says:

"Last Wednesday we saw the plans that have been under discussion in the Treasury . . . It is a nightmare vision of what would happen if the Tories are re-elected. The scrapping of the basic state pension; forcing people to take out private insurance for unemployment or sickness benefit".

Surely it was an act of gross negligence to prepare a press release for Labour Members without checking that it was prepared by one of their own prospective parliamentary candidates. Will the hon. Gentleman assure the House that the text of that press release will be amended to read, "It is a nightmare vision of what would happen if Labour were elected"?

Mr. Smith: I had expected better even of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): I had not.

Mr. Smith: I bow to my hon. Friend's wiser judgment.

The hon. Member for Shoreham must get it right. The lady in question, who has been traduced several times by Conservative Members, is not a prospective parliamentary candidate for the Labour party, although she is, I understand from press reports, a member of the Labour party, and that should make no difference whatever to her capacity to provide impartial service as a civil servant at the request of her superiors in the Treasury, and to provide that advice, with others, to the permanent secretary at the Treasury, answerable to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is not yet a member of the Labour party.

Not only are the Government presiding over a trend towards poverty, inequality and dependency, but they are setting about making it worse. In the past few days, we have had announcements from the Secretary of State about the ending of the freephone advice service, and the Government are considering ending direct payments to people on income support to cover their gas and electricity bills, which would make budgeting for low-income families much more difficult than it is at the moment.

We have also had further announcements about increasing non-dependant deductions on housing benefit, which will inevitably lead, as the Social Security Advisory Committee has constantly pointed out, to the increasing break-up of families. All of that is on top of the various measures that the Department announced earlier in the year in the uprating statement.

[Mr. Smith]

A sensible Government would not go about controlling the social security budget by chopping and slicing people's benefits and removing and reducing the money that people need to survive on and live. A sensible Government would, of course, get people back to work.

Many of the measures that the Government recently announced make the move from benefit to work more difficult rather than easier. The Government propose to cap housing benefit for under-25s at the level of shared accommodation rather than for ordinary property that someone of that age group can rent, and which is available. How will it encourage someone of that age group who is considering taking a risky or possibly temporary job, which may last only six months but will take them off housing benefit for that period, if, when they come back on to benefit at the end, they will be on the lower rate, and so might well face losing not just their job but their home at the same time?

Mr. Lilley: I should have thought it was self-evident, and that is why we introduced it. If people who are unemployed are able to get 100 per cent. of the housing benefit for properties that they would not be able to afford if they were in work, they will be trapped in unemployment. That is why we try to restrict them to housing benefit that is equal to the sort of shared accommodation that most people of that age can afford in work, so that they do not get trapped out of work on benefit, which is what the Labour party wants.

Mr. Smith: It appears that the Secretary of State's solution is to make the trap that he has identified twice as bad. The change that he is making means that someone who takes a temporary job will receive less housing benefit when he or she stops doing the job. Far from relieving people of that trap, the right hon. Gentleman is making the position much worse. The sooner Conservative Members realise that the better.

It is not only the creation of divisions in society and the removal of incentives to work that make the Government's stewardship of the welfare state incompetent; it now seems that their drafting of legislation is also incompetent. The Pensions Act 1995 demonstrates, fundamentally, the way in which the Government get it wrong. I am given to understand that, owing to a technical defect in its drafting, all the orders and regulations made under the Act so far—including commencement orders bringing various parts of it into effect—are legally invalid, and that there is no legal basis for bringing any of it into force, short of a retrospective enabling statute.

The defect is in the commencement section, section 180. As is usual in such cases, it provides for most provisions in the Act to be brought into force by order of the Secretary of State on such days as may be appointed. That is in subsection (1). Section 180 goes on to say that certain specified provisions—not including the section itself—will come into force on the day on which the Act receives the Royal Assent. The usual drafting of a commencement provision of this kind specifically includes the coming into force of the commencement section itself on the day on which the Act is passed. Section 180, therefore, is not one of the sections that came into force on the day of Royal Assent, but it is the only section that contains the power to make the orders necessary to bring the rest of the Act into force.

The only way out of the dilemma, which poses a real problem—it means that the Government cannot implement any of the Pensions Act—is to ensure that powers are validly exercised, and that the Act comes into force, by passing an amending Act declaring that section 180 came into force, and shall be deemed for all purposes to have done so, on Royal Assent. I look forward to hearing that the Government intend to do precisely that. It seems that, even when they are making changes, they do not make them properly and competently.

Mr. Jenkin: Devastating.

Mr. Smith: It is indeed devastating to the implementation of the Pensions Act. If the hon. Gentleman does not understand that, he ought to go back to the Act and read carefully what it actually says and does.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No. I have given way a good deal, and I want to make some progress.

Let me now turn to the issues that have been uppermost in people's minds during the past week. I refer to the signs that are now emerging from the Government and their supporters about a further agenda for wholesale privatisation of key parts of the welfare state.

The first piece of evidence dates from August 1993, when the No Turning Back group published a series of proposals for changes to the benefits system. Its proposals were in three phases—that is important, because much of what it proposed in the first and second phases has already come to pass.

Mr. Jenkin *indicated assent.*

Mr. Smith: The hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) nods assent. Of course, he was one of the authors of the document.

In the first phase, the group suggested cutting the period of unemployment benefit entitlement from one year to six months, and equalising the state pension age for men and women at 65. Both those suggestions have been implemented. The second phase suggested allowing management buy-outs of jobcentres. The private sector has been invited to run area offices together with the Benefits Agency. The group also suggested market testing of benefits administration. I shall turn shortly to what is happening about child benefit administration.

The first and second phases of the No Turning Back group document have been implemented. The third phase includes a proposal to give people the opportunity to contract out of unemployment and invalidity insurance and out of the basic state pension. The group said that employers should be made to insure employees against industrial injuries. It suggested abolishing mortgage interest tax relief, rent rebates and rent allowances. Given the Government's record in implementing the first two phases, we can only fear their intentions on the third.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): How can we be sure that, in six months, those will not be the policies of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)?

Mr. Smith: Those are not the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield, and will not be—in six months' time or thereafter.

After the No Turning Back group, the next organisation to get in on the act was the Adam Smith Institute. It held a conference early this month which was chaired by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), a former Secretary of State for Social Security and was attended by the present Secretary of State to launch its concept of a fortune account. The idea was that it would be an individual insurance account to replace the basic pension and other national insurance benefits.

It is noticeable that the news release that was published by the Adam Smith Institute to coincide with the conference mentions replacing

"a state system that is already compulsory but provides poor value for money."

Mr. Jenkin: Hear, hear.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman says, "Hear, hear," but the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not seem to agree with that proposal. In his speech at the London School of Economics, on 6 February he said:

"The social security system has been outstandingly successful in providing an income in those periods of life when people cannot earn because of sickness, disability, unemployment, caring for relatives or old age."

Those are completely contradictory statements. The Adam Smith Institute says that a state system provides poor value for money, and the Chancellor says that the system has been "outstandingly successful." I agree entirely with the Chancellor, who, on this matter at least, has greater validity than the Adam Smith Institute.

Following hard on the heels of the Adam Smith Institute, we had the news that there is a private sector welfare reform group on the go, meeting representatives not of the Department of Social Security but of the Department of Trade and Industry, and involving the heads of a number of Britain's insurance companies. We have no knowledge of what is happening in those meetings or what proposals are coming forward from them, but it would be interesting to know.

We then had the famous "kids in the office". I have no objection to serious, intelligent thinking about the future going on inside Government—heaven knows, it is rare enough under this Government. I have no objection to the use of impartial civil servants who happen to be members of the Labour party. However, the thinking revealed in the memorandum provided to the permanent secretary and generated within the Treasury was certainly not intelligent. I notice that parts of that Treasury memorandum have, even now, not been dismissed by the Chancellor and, indeed, have been supported by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), who chairs the Back-Bench finance committee of Tory Members.

What of the specific suggestions in the paper? They echo remarkably the proposals made by the No Turning Back group, and include opting out from the basic state pension and the provision of private insurance for unemployment and sickness cover. Do the Government realise how expensive such proposals would be for those who have to take out private insurance, and how much of a sink system would be left for those could not afford or obtain an insurance offer?

Let us take one example of where the full-blown privatisation, which now seems to be under consideration by the Government, fails: that is, in the Government's drive for personal pensions. We saw an advertising binge some time ago, and misselling that ensured that many hundreds of thousands of people left occupational schemes and took out personal pensions that they would have been better off without. There are still inordinate delays in sorting out the compensation to which they are entitled. Now we see that fees and charges are levied at rates of 25 or 30 per cent. on personal pensions, so that many people see the money they are saving from their hard-earned cash going down the drain.

That does not mean that there should be no private sector involvement, but putting the entire provision out to individual supply by the private sector is not the sensible way forward. There is a world of difference between using the skills of the private sector to improve collective provision and individualising that provision to an entirely commercial transaction. That is the key difference between modernisation of the welfare state and privatisation of the welfare state.

Our proposals for a new framework for second pensions contrast with the Government's hell-for-leather drive for personal pensions, which provide much worse value for money.

Mr. Stephen: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman has already had ample opportunity to intervene.

The same issue can be seen again in the announcements that the Secretary of State made on Friday about the wholesale privatisation of parts of the benefit administration.

Of course there is scope for sensible involvement of private sector expertise in the administration of the benefit system.

On Friday, the Government made three announcements, the third of which is a classic demonstration of how the private sector can sensibly be involved in the administration of the welfare system. The Secretary of State's press release states:

"The third initiative is to launch the procurement process for an Information Systems/Information Technology strategy to enable greater sharing of data between benefit systems, working closely with the private sector to provide the most up to date technologies, expertise and funding."

That is entirely sensible, but why on earth are the Government proposing to put the entire administration of child benefit out to the private sector? Is it badly run? Of course it is not.

It is extremely well run, as the letter from the chief executive of the Benefits Agency to staff at the child benefit centre makes clear:

"The hard work and commitment of staff in the Child Benefit Centre has been recognised not just within the Agency, with the award of the Benefits Agency Quality Award, but externally too in the achievement of the Charter Mark."

Child benefit is effectively and efficiently administered, as the early-day motion tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) clearly demonstrates.

What could be the Government's reason for putting it out to the private sector? Perhaps the administration of benefits has been proved to be better run in the private sector. I invite the Secretary of State to look at the

[Mr. Smith]

evidence of how the administration of housing benefit in Croydon, Bromley and Wandsworth changed when it was transferred to the private sector.

I also draw attention to the shambles of BET's three-year contract to run the back offices of the Benefits Agency in Lancashire and Cumbria. The consultant's report prepared just a few months ago on the operation of that contract stated:

"BET's brief was to handle typing, open the mail, run the messenger service, ensure stationery supplies were up to demand and operate security for the Agency's branches across the region."

The report concluded that the result was disaster:

"Benefits Agency staff were left without stationery, and last September BET failed to meet 43 per cent. of the targets set for opening post from claimants."

That is the record of private sector involvement in benefit administration, yet the Secretary of State plans to privatise the most efficient part of the Benefits Agency, supposedly in order to save money and improve efficiency.

I am afraid that it is quite clearly not about improving efficiency, because the system is already efficient. It shows that the Secretary of State is driven not by efficiency, but by dogma. Why does he not turn his attention to the parts of his empire where there are enormous failings in efficiency, such as the administration of the social fund that costs 61 per cent. in administration, or the Child Support Agency, where there is £1 billion of uncollected arrears?

I have two further points about the administration of child benefit. First, confidentiality is enormously important. If confidential information is placed into the hands of private companies, one can never be absolutely certain that it will not leak out.

Mr. Lilley: As the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have been relying on the leaks of confidential documents by public servants in the public sector, is it not absolutely contemptible for him to suggest that people in the private sector are less to be relied on?

Mr. Smith: I know of no instance in which an official of the Benefits Agency in the child benefit centre has ever revealed the personal details of any customer with whom the centre has had dealings. That is the answer to the Secretary of State's question.

A clear path is being mapped out within the Conservative party's ranks for what it sees as the future of the welfare state. First there was the No Turning Back group, then the Adam Smith Institute, then the welfare reform group meeting with the Department of Trade and Industry. Then came the kids in the office doing work at the behest of the Chancellor and his permanent secretary, and then the Secretary of State himself came out with his announcements last week.

Those are all signs of the direction in which the Government want to head. They herald not the sensible sharing of skills and practice between public and private sector, but a wholesale disposal of segments of the welfare state into private hands—not a modernisation of the welfare state, but a privatisation, not a sensible welfare-to-work strategy, but a chopping away, piece by piece and year by year, of citizens' entitlements.

Government policy represents not an endorsement of the social insurance principle that has rightly underpinned the welfare system since the days of Beveridge and Attlee, but a move towards private individualised insurance cover for some, and poorer provision for the rest. In short, that is not a welfare state that is safe in the Government's hands. It is time for a new Government to take over.

Mr. Jenkin: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Earlier in the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) referred to a draft core press release issued by the Labour party for use by Labour Members of Parliament. It contains long quotations, seemingly purporting to come from a speech already delivered in this debate in the House of Commons, which it is suggested that Members circulate to their local newspapers.

I draw the matter to your attention, Madam Deputy Speaker, because it is surely a deplorable practice for such a press release to be circulated in draft form in advance of the debate's taking place, and for words to be put into people's mouths that they have not yet uttered in this place.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I am afraid that that is not a matter for the Chair. The hon. Gentleman may wish to take it up in other ways.

4.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'welcomes the substantial progress made by Her Majesty's Government in ensuring that the welfare state continues to be affordable by focusing help on those with genuine need or entitlement; agrees that Her Majesty's Government should continue to seek positive and imaginative ways of ensuring that the welfare state continues to be both effective and affordable; supports Her Majesty's Government in striving to make the administration of the welfare state as effective and efficient as possible; notes that the Labour leadership is now criticised even by its own supporters for being vague and ineffectual on welfare issues; condemns the Labour Party's readiness to criticise people who do think radically about social security; deplores the Labour Party's knee-jerk opposition to the improvement of the benefit delivery system; and opposes the Labour Party's expensive and irresponsible plans for a new means-tested system Pension Entitlement and a flexible decade of retirement.'.

When the Opposition chose this subject for debate, I thought that, from their point of view, they were making a mistake. Now that we have heard the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) make his speech, we know that they were.

The central issue facing every developed country is reform of the welfare state to make it affordable, and the Opposition have demonstrated that they cannot rise to that challenge because they face it like an ostrich, with their head in the sand, rejecting the need for change, along with every positive suggestion for change and all the savings measures that we have adopted. They turn their eyes against any new thinking. Where they do suggest any policies, those are at best woolly and at worst dangerous. I shall actively encourage people who still think that the new Labour party brings no dangers to read the hon. Gentleman's speech, because then they would realise how dangerous Labour would be if it got into office.

The hon. Gentleman rested his basic attack on four planks, all of which have given way. Indeed, most of them gave way before the debate began. First the Opposition tried a spurious attack on the Government's alleged plans to dismantle the welfare state. The first basis of that attack was a condemnation of the measures that I announced to privatise the administration of child benefit.

That turned into something of an own goal. We seek to make savings by improving the administration of the benefits system because we want to maintain the value of benefits. The Opposition are determined to cut benefits and to take child benefit away from more than a million families, because they refuse to face the need to make savings in the administration. They refuse because they are so dominated by the public sector unions that they are committed to a unionised, monopolised state delivery throughout the system.

Mr. Chris Smith: Will the Secretary of State assure us that any savings that he makes by privatising parts of the administration of his Department, rather than going back to the Exchequer, will be used to upgrade and improve benefit levels?

Mr. Lilley: I should have thought that it was self-evident to anyone who takes a serious interest in the welfare state that the pressures for increased spending are such that we have to make the savings if we are to maintain a decent level of provision for people in need—and that is the Government's objective and why we do not flinch from taking difficult decisions. It is clear why the Labour party flinch from doing so.

The second plank of the Opposition attack was the leaked Treasury document, which was alleged to give an insight into Tory thinking, but turned out to give us an insight into the thinking of a wannabe Labour candidate, who claims, incidentally, according to the *Daily Express*, to be an "adviser" to the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer. It would be interesting to know whether the Opposition agree that that civil servant has been an adviser to the shadow Chancellor, or are they casting doubt on her integrity in making that claim in her curriculum vitae?

The third plank was that of the allegedly sinister meetings taking place between leaders of the insurance industry and Government officials in recent months to consider ways to extend private provision in the welfare system. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury does not seem to be aware that those meetings began not three months ago, as he suggested, but a year ago, when I called together the leaders of the insurance industry to discuss that issue.

Admittedly, the meeting was held privately and in confidence, but because I wanted it to be well informed, I invited the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and members of the Social Justice Commission. I also invited the former shadow spokesman for social security, the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), and I am pleased to be able to say that he accepted. Nothing was discussed at subsequent meetings that was not discussed at that excellent conference on the divide between the public and the private sector in the welfare system.

The final plank was the Adam Smith Institute's proposal for a fortune account. It launched that, not at its recent conference, but at the end of last year, when it published an interesting document developing the idea—on the basis of the Singapore measure—that everyone should have a separate account so that the individual citizen has not just an insurance policy but his or her personal stake in an insurance policy.

When the hon.Member for Islington, South and Finsbury was asked about that subject in a television interview at the turn of the year, he said:

"that is certainly one of the models we are looking at very seriously indeed . . . The beauty of that system is, of course, that it provides the individual citizen with not just an insurance policy but their own personal stake in that insurance policy, which they can use as a financial asset and in many cases they use it, for example, for house purchase in Singapore."

Far from being some madcap idea that I am associated with, it is an idea proposed by the Adam Smith Institute, and the hon. Gentleman has flirted with it, as he has flirted with so many ideas from far afield.

What has become dramatically apparent, not merely from this debate but from all the debates that we have had in recent weeks, is the Opposition's knee-jerk reaction to any plans to save money and target spending better. Since the start of this financial year, the Opposition have opposed or promised to reverse every measure that I have announced or introduced to focus benefit on those in need. Last week, the Opposition said that they would restore benefits to bogus asylum seekers. That would cost a Labour Government the best part of £300 million a year and rising.

Mr. Chris Smith: When did we say that?

Mr. Lilley: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman if he is saying that he is not committed to restoring them. What a moral cripple the hon. Gentleman is. What humbug he has displayed at the Dispatch Box, saying that it was the end of civilisation to withdraw those benefits. He is now casting doubt on a future Labour Government's commitment to restore them.

Mr. Smith: I am glad that the Secretary of State has sat down, because we could do with less childish abuse across the Dispatch Box. We have said clearly that we will speed up the processing of asylum applications and use the money that we save by doing so to restore a proper benefit arrangement for people who are in need and genuinely seeking asylum.

Mr. Lilley: If the availability of those benefits attracts so many people, as it will, that it is impossible to speed the process, as we have found, it will cost what I suggested it would, or Labour will leave our present system as it is.

Last week, it was £300 million on asylum seekers. The week before, the Opposition opposed plans to reduce housing benefit to households where someone has gross earnings of more than £200 a week. That would throw away £35 million a year. The same week, they opposed my plans to align increases in allowances for children with the start of the school year. That will save £115 million, and they are throwing it away. The week before that, they opposed plans to reduce benefits for parents who seek to avoid their responsibilities for pursuing child maintenance, which would save £15 million a year.

[Mr. Lilley]

In June, the Opposition opposed plans to restrict reduced earnings allowance to people of working age, as Parliament had always intended. That would save £30 million a year. They are throwing that away. In May, they opposed plans to align the mobility component of disability living allowance more closely with the care component and with most other benefits that are withdrawn during hospital stays. That is another £40 million that they would throw away. In April, they opposed measures to narrow the gap between benefits for single parents and for two-parent families. Over time, that could save as much as £600 million a year.

In just over four months, the Opposition have rejected well over £1 billion of savings without giving any indication of how they would replace the lost money. On top of that, they reject more than £750 million of efficiency savings from the change programme that I introduced. They have repudiated more than £1.75 billion of savings.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): What the Secretary of State refers to as savings is taking money from the pockets of the poorest people in society, including, as we heard, the miners who came here today. He is taking money from the meagre income of disabled pensioners. Is he proud of that?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman has a long and proud record of advocating increased expenditure on almost everything, but he is not a Front-Bench spokesman. Labour Front-Bench spokesmen pretend that they would not spend any more on social security but would cut it more effectively than would we.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): While the right hon. Gentleman is on this theme, does he accept that the people in most need, by the Government's criteria are, those who are on income support? Does he agree, that when such people have used the social fund, it is outrageous that more than 40 per cent. of its costs still go on administration? Should we not get more of that money to the people who desperately need help?

Mr. Lilley: That is right. That is why I am seeking through the change programme to streamline all benefit administration and why I thought that it was extraordinary that it was rejected root and branch by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. He has continued to object to every concrete measure in the general programme, despite the fact that the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury admitted in a leaked letter that my proposed savings were perfectly feasible.

When it comes down to it, the Government cut administration costs to avoid cutting benefit, and Labour proposes to cut benefits for pupils who stay at school after 16 because it is not prepared to cut administration costs. Labour is not only opposed to all the reforms that I have been introducing recently; it has opposed almost all the changes that I have introduced in this Parliament. It is also committed to increased expenditure. Almost every possible proposal that it has put forward involves increased expenditure, even when dressed up as a savings measure.

Of course, the Opposition are coy about their old pledges. Their document, "Security in Retirement", recently issued by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, talks about ensuring

"that all pensioners, today and tomorrow, share fairly in the increasing prosperity of the nation".

When they talk privately to the financial press, they say that that does not mean that they are committed to the old link between pensions and earnings. Pensions will be uprated only in line with prices. When they talk privately to their activists, Back Benchers and constituents, they hint that they are committed to expensive increases in pensions after the election.

No wonder sharp-eyed commentators have called for more clarity. Lady Barbara Castle said:

"The Labour party's policy statement—Security in Retirement—does not provide a plan of action or detailed and costed proposals about how to achieve adequate pensions . . . In too many respects the document is ambiguous and inconsistent . . . Labour must commit itself to the earnings link . . . But there is no such commitment in the document."

I know that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) will warmly support her campaign to persuade constituency Labour parties to commit the Labour party to that pledge.

Whether or not the Labour party implements its old pledge, it is certainly committed to new, expensive and dangerous pledges. The first is a guaranteed minimum pension. That was proposed by the leader of the Labour party in his party conference speech last October. He made it a defining characteristic of new Labour, and said:

"The aim of our policy is to guarantee a minimum income that provides dignity in old age. That is New Labour."

Of course, we already guarantee a minimum income of more than £100 for a couple via income support. If Labour's minimum pension guarantee were only 10 per cent. higher, it would cost £3 billion a year, discourage saving and extend means testing. As Lady Castle and Peter Townsend pithily put it:

"It is difficult to see how in practice the Minimum Pension Guarantee would differ from Income Support . . . it is the same old hated and unworkable means test in disguise."

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: My right hon. Friend missed one element of the equation. If many more people were put on to means testing, by the measure that the Opposition tend to use, many more people would be in "poverty". The system they advocate undermines the statistical basis on which they attack the Government.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right. The Opposition are being hoist by their own petard. As they refuse to make any savings on administration, they would probably have to cut benefits elsewhere and doubtless, on the same measure, claim that they were reducing poverty.

The other main Opposition proposal is to introduce a flexible decade of retirement, allowing people to draw their pension at the age of 60 instead of 65. People can already defer taking their pensions and be rewarded by a 7 per cent. increase for every year that they defer. However, 90 per cent. of people take their pensions at the first opportunity. If they continue to do so under Labour's proposal, it would cost £15 billion a year extra. The hon. Member for Islington, South and

Finsbury put out a press release to criticise me when I last pointed out that his document says that that will be done only in a way that will mean no extra cost to the Treasury. The only way that the right to a pension can be extended by five years with no extra burden to the Treasury is by reducing the value of the pension. I will happily give way to Opposition spokesmen if they can suggest one.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Use the same formula that was introduced by the Government most recently for Ministers and Members of Parliament.

Mr. Lilley: Unfortunately, that was not costless to the Treasury, which is why the Government opposed it. I would still be happy to give way to the Opposition's pensions spokesmen so that they can tell us, in qualitative terms, how they can make the flexible decade of retirement no extra burden on the Treasury without cutting the basic rate of pension. It cannot be done, and the Opposition ought to realise it.

My ultimate objective is an affordable welfare state which provides decent benefits to those who need them and are genuinely entitled to them. Therefore, my first objective is to save money without affecting benefit levels. That means cracking down on fraud and streamlining administration. Most organisations in the private sector have achieved dramatic improvements in efficiency. I believe that we can do likewise, especially if we learn from and, where appropriate, work with the private sector. That is why I launched my change programme, which aims to achieve a 25 per cent. increase in efficiency. That means savings worth £0.75 billion.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury condemned my programme as damaging, dangerous and impossible when I announced it. His colleague the shadow Chief Secretary concluded that it was perfectly feasible. None the less, he has continued to attack each concrete step forward that I have announced. Indeed, he declared on the "Today" programme that he has an "ideological" objection—I use his word—to private participation in the administration of benefits. That would seem to mean that Labour would not continue to use the 19,000 sub-post offices, all of them private, to deliver benefits. I take it that it is not Labour's intention to nationalise them.

If not, how does the hon. Gentleman reconcile the continued use of a private sector delivery mechanism with his ideological objection to the private sector playing any part in the administration of the core benefits provided by the Department? The fact that the hon. Gentleman says mutually contradictory things on odd and even days of the week does not help the House elucidate exactly what he is committed to.

My second objective in reforming the welfare state has been to focus benefits on genuine need. Savings from my reforms will reach £5 billion a year in the next Parliament and £15 billion a year thereafter. The Opposition have opposed them all. They have not told us where they would get the extra money, so they start off that far behind, with that obligation to raise taxes. Finally, it is essential to encourage self-provision. We believe in a welfare society in which both the state and the private sector play full roles.

The role of the private sector is already enormous. Eighty-five per cent. of employers run their own sick pay schemes. Fifteen million households, that is two thirds, have life assurance, and 1.3 million people have permanent health policies. We have friendly societies with 8 million members which manage funds worth about £3.25 billion. The proportion of people who have insured their mortgages against periods of sickness or unemployment is rising sharply.

All that private provision is capped by the enormous private pension provision in Britain, which has enabled us to build up some £600 billion of pension funds to pay for future pensions. That is not only more than any other country on the continent has built up in similar funds, but more than all the other countries of the European Community put together have bothered to save and invest to meet the growing number of pensioners in the years to come.

Mr. Stephen: Is it correct that the unfunded liability of Germany will be equal to its gross national product by 2030? By contrast, have not we in Britain built up a vast fund—my right hon. Friend tells us that it is £600 billion—which not only will provide security for people in their old age but provides an enormous fund for investment in British productive industry?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is the case. It is something in which we take great pride and on which we have been determined to build by introducing measures to encourage further growth of occupational and personal pension schemes. If they did not exist, and if none of the private provision that I mentioned earlier did not exist, we would have to pay out some further £25 billion a year to take over on behalf of the state what is currently provided by the private sector. That would increase the state's budget by about a third.

So it is absurd to take the "ideological" position—I use the word of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury—of hostility to the development of private provision not only for administration but for general provision of insurance and saving products to allow people to boost their position in times of need.

The Labour party has finally destroyed any claim it ever had to be able to reform the welfare state. It has set itself rigidly against any serious change or reform. It opposes every savings measure. It is opposed even to making savings on running costs. It is opposed to sensible private sector involvement even where it will give value for money. It repudiates any expansion of private sector provision of benefits. The reason why it does so is clear—a mixture of ideological hostility to the private sector and subservience to the public sector unions which insist on monopoly state provision, and which, of course, sponsor so many Front-Bench Opposition Members.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, welfare reform is the key issue worldwide. We are leading Europe in sensible and imaginative reforms. I believe that welfare reform will be a key issue at the next election. The voters will utterly reject the Labour party's ostrich-like approach to the issue and endorse our sensible steady, caring and effective approach.

4.55 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): When the Secretary of State talks about reform of the welfare state, he means substantial undermining of the welfare state. That is how he conceives reform. However, he was right in one thing. He said that the matter would be decided at the general election. Indeed it will—the sooner the better.

It is always useful when we have such debates to recognise that there is a fundamental difference between the Government and the Opposition on state provision in welfare and related matters. The Secretary of State nods in approval. At one time, the situation was different. In the early post-war years, when the Labour Government built up the welfare state—one of the greatest blessings that this country has known—the Conservative party took a different view. It took the view that, if it was to win back and hold on to office, it had to accept what had been legislated for between 1945 and 1951. For some years in government, the Tories more or less accepted the welfare provisions. That changed about 30 years ago.

The Tory party has been under mounting pressure from right-wing think tanks to do away with a great deal of what was achieved by the Labour Government in the early post-war years. For example, in 1990, before the Secretary of State occupied his present position, what I describe as the wrongly named Adam Smith Institute argued in a pamphlet that unemployment benefit should be privatised. That led to quite a row in the House at Social Security Question Time on 2 July that year.

A pamphlet, with which the Secretary of State perhaps privately agrees, argued that unemployment benefit should be a matter for the private sector, not the state sector, and that sudden increases in unemployment, which would be a burden on the private sector, could be dealt with by not paying unemployment benefit in the first few weeks. That was suggested as one way of saving money.

The pamphlet also said that people should be able to tide themselves over short periods. When people with family responsibilities and the rest of it, including my constituents, lose their jobs, few of them are in a position to tide themselves over until they can find another job without unemployment benefit and, where appropriate, income support. Bearing in mind the low pay that so many people receive in this country, that is hardly surprising. The people who write such pamphlets live in a different world. They do not live in the real world that we know about and a large majority of our constituents have to endure.

It is interesting that the pamphlet six years ago said that unemployment benefit should be paid for less than 12 months. I am sure that those who were responsible for the pamphlet will be pleased that the Tory Government have implemented that aspect of it by introducing the jobseeker's allowance, an entirely unjustified measure to reduce unemployment benefit from 12 to six months. When the constituents of Conservative Members become unemployed, I wonder how many of them will applaud what the Government have done with the jobseeker's allowance.

Mr. Sykes: Why can the hon. Gentleman not persuade Opposition Front Benchers to promise to reverse the measure?

Mr. Winnick: The question comes from two quarters. Tory Members want us to make commitments so that they can then ask where we shall get the money to pay for them—of course they will. Likewise, somewhat to my surprise, the Liberal spokesperson, the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), made the same point. If the Liberals stood a chance of forming the Government, they would understand the position, which my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench already understand.

The state pension is vital for millions of people: it is not some sort of extra, but the core amount for millions of people who retire. If there is any dispute about that, I refer the House to a parliamentary reply about the state pension that was recently given by the Under–Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for North Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald), on 11 July. Anyone who suggests that the pension does not amount to a large proportion of a retired person's income should consider that written answer. It said that 72 per cent. of pensioner households relied on the state pension for 50 per cent. of their income—quite a large amount—and 51 per cent. of pensioner households in the country relied on a state pension for 75 per cent. of their income.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Why should we take lessons from a Member of Parliament whose party twice stopped the Christmas bonus for old-age pensioners?

Mr. Winnick: It is rather an impertinence—

Mr. Sykes: Apologise.

Mr. Evans: Apologise.

Mr. Winnick: If there are any apologies to be made, they should come from the Conservative Government who, in 1980—I was in the House when it happened—decided that they would no longer increase the pension in line with earnings, and pensioners lost out. Before I am asked again the inane question why the Labour party does not make a commitment, I can say that I have already given my response.

The Labour Front-Bench team recognises that, when there is a Labour Government, Labour Members will use every opportunity to try to see to it that pensioners' income is substantially increased whenever possible. I do not notice any pressure being exerted by Tory Members on Ministers to increase the state pension other than in line with inflation. That is an important difference which the country recognises: the commitment of Labour Members to improve the living standards of those who have retired.

I do not accept that the private sector can provide adequate pensions for the large number of pensioners. In his concluding remarks, the Secretary of State paid lip service to the private sector and all that it can do. It cannot provide anywhere near adequate pensions for the large number of people on low pay—I am talking not about 100,000 or 500,000 people but about millions of people.

I do not believe that the private sector is interested in such people. The private sector cannot provide pensions for those people who are often in and out of work through no fault of their own or for the long-term unemployed. Ministers and Tory Members refuse to recognise that, time and again, it is the state that provides the core support that people would not otherwise have. That is why the Labour party is committed to building up the welfare state, and that is why reforms have been carried out by successive Labour Governments.

Many people were actively encouraged to opt out of the state earnings-related pension scheme and to take up personal pension schemes—we know what has happened to a large number of those schemes. Many Conservative Members would not, on reflection, try to defend or justify such schemes—I leave aside pension swindles and the other matters that we know about.

I want the state pension to be improved. I hope that it will be possible for the Labour Government to do so in the way previously undertaken. I understand the difficulties and I shall not say from the Back Benches what I would not be able to say from the Front Bench. To make commitments at this stage would only play into the hands of the present Government.

We owe a responsibility to the retired population and to all those people who have had difficulties in the past, certainly before the second world war, in finding work. We have a commitment as well to those who worked in the post-war years, believing that, when they retired, they would have an adequate pension on which to live.

I sometimes get the impression that Conservatives believe that it is undignified to rely on the state, and that one should always have one's own private means. I shall relate a personal experience, when I felt no loss of dignity when I had to rely on the state. As some of my hon. Friends know, I was recently in hospital and, having paid my insurance contributions all my employed life, I felt no indignity when I relied on the hospital and the medical staff—I relied on them for my life. I was very pleased at what the medical staff were able to do when it came to my NHS operation, which I hope will have lasting effects. I felt no indignity because I did not reach for my chequebook; I had paid already and will continue to pay through my national insurance contributions, as I am fortunate enough to earn my living—many people in this country are denied that opportunity.

That episode illustrates the welfare state. Unlike other countries such as the United States where there are private insurance schemes—many of which are inadequate—in this country, when I required state help, it was there. Conservative Members will probably say that the NHS continues. I know that the Secretary of State does not have direct responsibility for the NHS, but he is a member of the Cabinet.

One of the lessons that I learned—if I needed to—from first-hand experience during my first two days in hospital earlier this year involved the tremendous financial pressures under which the hospital operated. There had to be negotiations between hospitals when patients needing needed to be operated on, which was not dignified—I shall use the word, as I have used it earlier—for the surgeons and others involved. We should have no complacency about what has happened to the NHS in the past 17 years.

The Treasury leaked document gives a good sign of what the Government are thinking. It shows that civil servants respond to the Government; they do not respond to this Government by writing a report on how to restore full employment or how to restore adequate state provision. The leaked document, whether the work of Treasury kids or others, is genuine—the Secretary of State would not wish to deny it—and is based on Government thinking. It is the duty and responsibility of civil servants to act accordingly and to place on paper the options that are open to the Government, given their political line.

The welfare state, which I described earlier as one of this country's great blessings, has undoubtedly been undermined. The NHS has been undermined; pensions have been undermined. People's security has been undermined—the security people felt because, when, in their old age, they were no longer able to look after themselves, they would be able to go to a local authority home. We know that that no longer happens in most instances—increasingly, one has to pay for oneself. If someone does not have a spouse and is an owner-occupier, his house will be sold from under him.

Mr. Stephen: How can the hon. Gentleman say with a straight face that the NHS has been undermined, when he knows perfectly well that it now treats more patients to a higher standard than ever before in this nation's history?

Mr. Winnick: The hon. Gentleman is not facing reality—he should visit a number of hospitals. Drawing on my experience, I told the Secretary of State about the pressure on hospitals; I should add that there is now even greater pressure as a result of the changes that have been made in the past two or three years. If the hon. Gentleman does not accept my word, I suggest that he talk to some of the doctors, surgeons and nurses in the national health service, who will confirm what I have said.

Mr. Sykes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Winnick: No, I wish to conclude my speech.

The Government have undermined the welfare state in all the areas that I have mentioned—including through the jobseekers' allowance, reduced housing benefits and much-increased prescription charges. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) referred to the leaked document and to related matters. In every constituency, especially in marginal constituencies, we have to get the point across in relation to what a re-elected Tory Government would do.

We should have a general election now. If what I am saying is not true, why are the Government terrified? Why are they not calling an election until the last possible moment? They know what would happen if there were a general election now, which is why they are holding on. The Government know that people accept what my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, other Labour Members and I have been saying: the welfare state is being eroded and undermined because the Government have no serious commitment to it. When Labour is in office, we will try to help in every way we can the people who elect us to the House of Commons. We have a duty and a responsibility to the ordinary people of our country. A Labour Government will carry out their responsibilities accordingly.

5.11 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I congratulate the Opposition on choosing this important subject for today's debate. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has said, this is one of the most important topics with which Governments in the developed world are grappling—they are wrestling with the cost of providing welfare against a background of demographics that involves fewer people providing for more people.

[Mr. Peter Ainsworth]

This is an international trend and it is facing every single Government. It is right for the Labour party to bring this subject before the House.

Mr. Sykes: Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating the hospital that treated the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), as it obviously did a good job? However, will he remind hon. Members that it was not that long ago—perhaps 1978 or 1979—that members of the Confederation of Health Service Employees and other unions were picketing the hospitals?

Mr. Ainsworth: Yes, I remember those dark and terrible days. The hon. Member for Walsall, North seems to be in sparkling form, but, alas, his hospital treatment seems to have done nothing to improve his judgment.

It is important to put any debate on welfare in its proper context. Any welfare state depends on the wealth creators in society. If we impede their ability to prosper—if we hinder their enterprise by excessive regulation, by state interference or by bureaucracy, or if we tax them too highly—they will suffer, as will the most vulnerable people in society who depend on the whole process of wealth creation. The ability of the state to provide depends on the ability of individuals to prosper.

I ask one key question about the welfare state in Britain: is it working? I understand that, since 1949, spending on welfare in this country has increased by 5 per cent. over and above inflation every year—in fact, it has grown by double the rate of the national economy. This has created an enormous burden for this generation and for future generations of taxpayers. The welfare budget is currently costing the average working person £75 a week. Therefore, one would expect the problems that the welfare state was set up to tackle too have been eliminated—but that is far from the case. Despite the excellent efforts of my right hon. Friend to rein back future growth expenditure, the overall rate of expenditure on welfare is projected to increase. It is quite clear from that fact alone that the welfare state is not working as it should be or as was intended.

Any civilised society that can afford to do so should establish the sort of safety net that Beveridge intended when he established the welfare state. There should be a set of basic provisions to protect the poor, the disabled, the vulnerable and the weak in society. Is it right that the welfare industry should stretch so far beyond that? Is it not the case that, to the extent that the state acts as a surrogate for individual responsibility, it diminishes individuals? It closes off options, it increases dependency and, eventually, it undermines humanity's basic right to choice.

The arguments for reducing the scope of the welfare state, for encouraging greater self-reliance, greater individual and family responsibility, are not only economic—important though the economic arguments are—but moral. Some hon. Members thought that the Labour party had grasped this essential point—the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) appears to have grasped it, and he speaks with great authority on the subject of welfare and social services. If he had not grasped that point, he would not be leading his Social Services Committee on a delegation to Chile in September to learn the lessons of the most privatised pensions system in the world. He is at least prepared to explore alternatives and to think radically about these important issues. I think that some of this radicalism lay behind the thinking of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) when he instructed the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) to go out and think the unthinkable.

I fear that very little progress has been made, and I am depressed. It seems to me that one of the things that is unthinkable about the current welfare state is that it should continue as it has over the years—that it should get more and more expensive and not solve the fundamental problems that it was set up to tackle. In so far as Labour policy appears simply to advocate a further increase in spending and more of the same, that is certainly thinking the unthinkable. The Labour party's proposals, such as are visible, increase spending dramatically and do nothing to lessen dependency.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the guaranteed minimum income for pensioners—if set at 10 per cent. above income support—would cost no less than £3 billion more than it currently does. In addition, it would bring more pensioners on to income support, increase costs and increase dependency. The flexible decade of retirement would cost another £15 billion a year, or there would be much lower state pensions.

Far from thinking the unthinkable in the terms that the Leader of the Opposition had in mind, the Labour party is committed to doing away with the excellent reforms that my right hon. Friend has been working on. They are aimed at reducing the cost of welfare and at targeting those in real need. As my right hon. Friend said, they amount to around £5 billion of savings in this Parliament. We are already up to £20 billion on Labour's spending plans but, oddly, we hear of absolutely no plans to increase taxation. I simply do not understand how the Opposition have the gall to come forward with proposals that will cost billions of pounds and not tell a soul how they will fund their proposals.

I began by congratulating the Opposition on choosing this important subject for debate and, as we have heard, they obviously prepared their ground carefully. I suspect that they were inspired to choose the subject by the so-called leaked Treasury document about which we have heard so much. My hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen), among others, has drawn attention to the extraordinary draft press release that seems to have found its way into the wrong hands. It is entitled "Tories Set to Dismantle the Welfare State". It states:

"Speaking on the day the House of Commons debates the future of the welfare state"—

blank—

"MP for"—

blank—

"spelt out today his/her fears about secret Tory plans to dismantle the welfare system on which we all depend.

"Last Wednesday we saw the plans that have been under discussion in the Treasury," said"—

blank—

""It is a nightmare vision".

So it continues.

Oh dear. It turns out that the author of the Treasury document was one Helen Goodman, a Labour party activist who is seeking selection in a safe seat in the north

of England. When the subject was raised earlier, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury leapt to her defence and said that everything was all right because she was an unsuccessful Labour party activist who had not been chosen for the safe seat of Barnsley, East. That will not wash.

Mr. Chris Smith: Is the hon. Gentleman seeking to imply that Helen Goodman is not capable of showing due impartiality in her duties as a civil servant? If he is, he is traducing her reputation as a professional civil servant.

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman would do better to address his question to "blank", Member of Parliament for "blank".

The right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has said of the work by that Labour party activist that it

"provides an insight into a Tory fifth term that would be not just a lurch, but a stampede to the right."

The issue has more to do with the debate between new Labour and old Labour than with the Conservative Government's policy. The lady in question—perhaps because of her embarrassment—seems, properly, not too keen to own up to being a Labour party activist. When she was asked by *The Sunday Times* whether she was seeking to be a Labour party candidate, she replied evasively several times and finally said:

"No, I am four months pregnant."

Since when was being four months pregnant an effective bar on becoming a Labour party candidate? That is not very new Labour.

Mr. Nigel Evans: New Labour, new labour.

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall resist the temptation to make an inappropriate and politically incorrect jest. The lady was at least thinking the unthinkable in the way that the Leader of the Opposition had in mind, and perhaps that is why she was unsuccessful in her bid for a parliamentary career.

We must continue to work to reduce the welfare bill. It is too high and it is unsustainable. We must work to continue to make welfare and benefits more effective where they are most needed. We can do that by focusing on those who are in real need, by encouraging personal responsibility and by improving incentives to work and to save. The Opposition will do none of that, partly, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, because they are too dependent on the public sector unions to get away from the old ways of state provision for everybody and partly too, I suspect, because in many areas they have a vested interest in the dependency cycle and in the votes that come from dependency.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is making excellent progress in delivering a more effective and cost-efficient welfare state. I urge him to continue with his work, because there is much more to do.

5.24 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): Whenever we talk about the future of the welfare state, value for money is hardly ever mentioned and it has not really been mentioned in the debate today. We have heard a lot about the total cost of the welfare budget, but nothing about what it buys or provides for people.

We have heard so much talk about private provision, but quite apart from the fact that the weakest will fall through the net if we change to private provision, we should consider the cost to the individual. If people have to buy private provision, their bills at the end of the week or month will be far greater than under the welfare state run by the Government. I know that the Government want to cut back on the welfare bill so that they can offer tax cuts before the next election. That is fine, but they should be honest and say how much a change to private provision would cost a family at the end of the month.

Let us take the example of health provision. In America now, people get a lesser service and have to spend more on it. Many Americans find it difficult to manage, but still people say that private provision is the best way forward for welfare benefit. Surely the basic principle of insurance is to spread the cost, and how better to spread the cost than through a Government-run scheme?

The next problem, if we introduced private provision, would be the social consequences. Anyone who thinks that private provision can replace the welfare state should consider the joint study published by the Disability Alliance and the Disablement Income Group entitled "There May Be Trouble Ahead". The report's conclusion is that occupational pensions and health insurance are no substitute for a state disability income scheme, especially for the most vulnerable in society.

Occupational pensions have their place—I do not dispute that—but that place is as an addition to the basic state pension. We believe that income support should be replaced by a top-up to the basic state pension, with occupational pensions in addition, not as a replacement for the current provision.

Other bodies are saying that private provision will not work. The 1994 report by the Social Security Advisory Committee suggested that those most at risk would get either inadequate cover or none at all. The report states:

"Unless the insurance industry produced a package which, in effect, replicated the wide coverage of risks accepted by the state scheme, we see little prospect of a greater involvement of the private sector in provision for sickness, disability and unemployment in such a way that it would supplant state provision for the majority of the population and for high risk vulnerable groups in particular."

So many people have said in the media and in the House that a demographic time bomb is ready to explode because of our aging population, but the reality is slightly different. The Department of Social Security's own statistics show that 15 per cent. of the population were over 65 in 1990 but that 14 per cent. would be over 65 in 2000—a decrease of 1 percentage point. The figure is projected to rise to 16 per cent. by 2020; that is worrying, but it is far from alarming.

Hon. Members may claim that the problem will be the proportion represented by the work force as compared with retired people, but that figure is not so bad as we have been led to believe by all the people in the media and the politicians who have gone on television talking about a demographic time bomb. There will not be a sizeable increase until the year 2020. After that, however, the increase will be substantial.

I accept that there is a problem, but it will not begin to bite for another 24 years. That being so, we should plan rather than panic. Unfortunately, however, people are panicking about the budget for the welfare state. Some are running from one television studio to another. Many

[Ms Liz Lynne]

commentators are saying that we face a crisis and others are writing to that effect in the press. But we are not at that stage. The problem will not be reached until 24 years have passed, when there will be more people of pensionable age than of working age.

We must defend the basic principle of the welfare state. At the same time, we must make the system more efficient and effective. We must have a war on waste, and one consideration should be benefit overpayments. We know that income support overpayments amounted to £546 million last year alone, mainly due to official error. The Government must recognise that problem. There are all the other benefit overpayments. We must cut overpayments and benefit fraud, and I welcome some of the measures that the Government are taking to reduce benefit fraud.

We must also have a proper back-to-work strategy. Some politicians say that such a policy would slash the social security budget, but they seem to forget that more than half that budget is directed to pensioners, so there would not be the dramatic slash that some envisage. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the need to get people back into work.

It will not be an easy task to return people to work. No one in any political party argues to the contrary. There will be no real savings in the short term because child care and proper training cost a great deal of money, but a policy to return people to work will be a good investment for the future, and we must look to the future—especially to the year 2020. Investment must take place now to ensure that we can afford our pensions bill and the welfare state generally in the future.

One way of getting people back to work cheaply is the benefit transfer scheme whereby employers are paid the benefits that would otherwise go to keeping someone unemployed. Another approach is to merge income support and family credit so that people are always better off in work. The family credit taper could operate with one merged low-income benefit.

We must help disabled people into work. Many say that that is not a priority, but I believe that it is. We greatly need a civil rights for disabled persons Bill, and Liberal Democrats are committed to that. We must ensure that we get disabled people into work. It would also cut the benefits bill. It makes sense to help disabled people with transport and other access problems.

Child benefit must be protected. The Labour party is desperately wrong in proposing to cut child benefit for 16 to 18-year-olds. That will not encourage young people to stay on at school. The key feature of the benefit is that it is received by the mother. How are poorer families to support a young person at school? How will they support their children by providing food and clothes? The bills are enormous.

The Government are also wrong to have in mind privatising the delivery of child benefit. Are we at the start of the slippery slope? Are the Government starting with child benefit because it is fairly easy, but with the intention of moving on to other benefits thereafter? Are they saying that Government Departments cannot run the system well and cheaply? Are they saying that the private sector can run it more cheaply, notwithstanding profit margins? It seems strange that the Department of Social Security does not have its own house in order. I am also worried about the confidentiality of records.

We need definite assurances that those on low pay will continue to be paid child benefit on a weekly basis if that is their preference. I have heard rumours that it is to be paid straight into bank accounts. The Government must understand that many people still do not have bank accounts. People should not be excluded from child benefit because they do not have a bank account. Similarly, it should not be made more difficult for them to receive it: they should not have to run around trying to open an account.

The Government and the Labour party are so keen to cut costs and to save money for the Treasury that they forget the bills that a household faces at the end of the week. They also forget that our welfare state works well—extremely well for some people, including some who are disabled. I strongly believe that the welfare state is under threat from the Government and from those on the Opposition Front Bench. All of us in the House who are like-minded must fight to save the welfare state.

5.35 pm

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): It is characteristic of new Labour, as it was of old Labour, to make wild and unsubstantiated allegations. We heard the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), who has since left his place, allege that the Conservative party is undermining the national health service. I challenged him by pointing out that the NHS now treats more patients to higher standards than ever before. The hon. Gentleman could not deny that.

Likewise, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said in his opening speech that the Government are dismantling the welfare state. What nonsense that is. Are the Government really dismantling a welfare state on which they spend £90 billion a year? That is more than a third of all Government spending—spending which costs every working person in the land £15 every working day. How can that level of expenditure possibly show that the Government do not care about the welfare state?

What do the Opposition want us to spend? Do they want us to spend 100 per cent. of the gross national product on the welfare state? If not, how much do they want us to spend? When it comes to spending, Labour is coy: whenever we challenge Labour Members to say how much tax they would levy and how much public expenditure there would be under a Labour Government, they say, "We are having a review." They have had 17 years to have a review. Is it not about time they came to some conclusions?

We on the Conservative side accept the responsibility of the welfare state. We accept that, through no fault of their own, there will always be people in our society who need the help of the rest of us as taxpayers. We are committed to providing that support, but we are certainly not committed to providing support for scroungers and fraudsters. Nor are we committed to providing support for those who work in the administration of the benefit system just because they are employed there: the benefits system exists to deliver benefits in the most cost-effective way, not just to employ people.

We on the Conservative side accept responsibility to those less fortunate, and that is why we have increased taxes. It is much to our electoral disadvantage to increase

taxes, but we had to do so because the alternative was to cut spending on pensions, hospitals, schools and the welfare state. Those vital services had to be maintained by the Government, and they were.

We have also had to increase borrowing. We did it much against our will, and again much to our electoral disadvantage, but we did it because we accept our responsibility to those less fortunate.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will take into consideration the £17.5 billion that the Government wasted on the poll tax, which failed after one year. What does he say about that waste of money, which was the result of the dogma of the then Prime Minister?

Mr. Stephen: I do not want to dispute figures with the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps we can check them later. However, whether they are true or not, I entirely agree with him that any waste and any inefficiency is to be deplored. There will be mistakes, of course. Mistakes have been made by Labour Governments and by the present Government. I do not say that the Government are infallible. Unfortunately, at the moment the public are inclined to compare the Government with a party of paragons which never makes a mistake, when what they should be doing is comparing the Government with the real Labour alternative.

Private provision has been talked about a great deal and it has its place. Private pension provision has been an enormous success. It has built up a fund of £600 billion to provide security for people in their old age and an enormous fund for investment in British industry. The Government have helped people to make that provision for themselves by giving generous tax relief.

Private provision, whether for pensions, unemployment benefit or hospital care, is only for those who can afford such provision. I and all my right hon. and hon. Friends accept that there will always be people who cannot afford that, and we accept our responsibility for ensuring that they are looked after.

It lies ill in the mouth of the Opposition to complain about the administration of the benefit system when, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) said earlier, it was the Labour party that so mismanaged the economy that it could not even pay the £10 Christmas bonus. Meagre as it was, they could not pay it. The Opposition talk about how well they will look after pensioners, but when they are put to the test, they fail, as they have failed in almost every area of policy.

The Opposition talk about the number of people on benefit and allege that the Government have doubled the number. They have forgotten about the recession which laid waste the economies of France, Germany, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and others, and when they do not forget about it, they blame it on the British Government. That is nonsense.

The Opposition have also forgotten about technology. I am sure that Opposition Members will have visited factories in their constituencies. Five years ago they would have seen people bent over the workbench. Today, the factories in my constituency and theirs have hardly anyone in them. Rows and rows of robot machines are tended by a few people in white coats. Technology has destroyed a whole range of jobs which existed five or 10 years ago.

The Government have had to pull Britain not only through the worst economic recession since 1929 but through the second industrial revolution. That we have managed to do that without cutting spending on the national health service but increasing it, without cutting spending on schools but increasing it, without cutting pensions but raising them year upon year, in the light of those two factors of world importance, shows that the Government have got it right.

We are accused of leaving children in poverty. Opposition Members may not realise this, but the main cause of child poverty is marriage break-up. Marriage break-up is a phenomenon of our time that we all deplore, but to lay that at the Government's feet is fatuous. The Opposition talk about children in poverty in the same breath as their policy, which from time to time they deny, to deprive 16 to 18-year-olds of child benefit.

The Opposition say that we must get people back to work. That is another characteristic of new Labour, as of old Labour—vacuous, well-meaning phrases that mean nothing and contribute nothing to the debate. Time and again, we ask Labour Members how they actually propose to get people back to work and they answer, "We are having a review."

Why on earth should a person under 25 receive housing benefit sufficient to cover the cost of an entire flat when they could share accommodation? Almost all hon. Members here would have shared a flat when we were under 25. It is absurd to expect low-income taxpayers to provide such people not just with shared accommodation but with flats of their own. It is ridiculous.

That leads to the general point that, the closer the standard of living for a person on benefit is to the standard that he would have if he were in employment, the less incentive there is for that person to take employment.

The Government are tackling the problem of fraud. Housing benefit probably suffers from some of the worst fraud. We have all heard of the person who draws housing benefit for a flat, moves out of the flat and in with his girl friend, lets the flat to somebody else and pockets the money. Such fraud must be rooted out.

The Opposition also expect the low-earning taxpayer to subsidise the asylum seeker. We are all prepared to subsidise the genuine asylum seeker, but the Opposition want our hard-working constituents to dig into their pockets to subsidise the bogus asylum seeker: the person who comes to Britain and tells the immigration officer a pack of lies, saying that he is here as a student or a business man, or on holiday, and then three weeks later says that in reality he is an asylum seeker. Such people do not deserve benefit, and I do not think any hon. Member could ask a low-earning taxpayer in his constituency to subsidise such people. It makes no sense at all.

Labour Members talk of pensions at 60. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, most people, given the chance, will take their pension at the earliest opportunity. That would cost the taxpayer huge amounts of money; yet we hear nothing from the Opposition about where they will find it.

We can sum up the situation by saying that the Labour party has an investment in dependency. It is dependent on those who work in the public sector and deliver the benefits. It has a vested interest in keeping people in dependent poverty. They are the Labour party's

[Mr. Stephen]

constituency. They are the people who the Labour party thinks will vote for it. By contrast, the Conservative party is committed to a safety net for those genuinely in need—a safety net which does not smother people but provides an incentive for them to stand on their own feet. We are committed to a benefit system which is not riddled with fraud and which delivers taxpayers' money in the most cost-effective way.

5.47 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North–West): Of all the contributions to today's debate, that by the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) was one of the more fatuous. I hope shortly to demonstrate that the thrust of new Labour's policy has, for some years now, been exactly the opposite of what the hon. Gentleman implied.

Earlier, the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) made it clear that the leaked document was an anticipation of Conservative policy. If the Government have given up on the United Kingdom's economic performance and accepted that decline is inevitable, it is not surprising that they see a major reshaping of the welfare state as an unavoidable consequence of that failure of their economic policy.

During the Conservative Government's period in office, we have had the lowest growth in GDP and the lowest growth in employment of any of the major European Union countries, and we have slipped from 13th to 18th in the prosperity league. That is hardly a record of which any Government could be proud. They are the three basic indices of prosperity—GDP, ranking in the league and the ability to create jobs. I have not invented the figures. They are published regularly, by the Government and reputable international organisations.

Conservative Members do not want to face up to the fact that, in the foreseeable future, we shall be overtaken by Thailand, Brazil and Indonesia. *[Interruption.]* Those are the facts. We do not produce them; they are produced for us. Conservative Members may not like those facts, but they will have to listen to them. That is why they are confronted with this radical restructuring, privatisation and downgrading of the welfare state.

The figures make the point for them. Since the Conservatives have been in office, the number of households with no wage earner has increased from one in 12 to one in five—20 per cent. Spending on means-tested benefits has increased from 17 to 35 per cent. Welfare spending on non-pensioner households—it is nothing to do with pensions, where we are relatively well funded; I do not try to deny that fact—has increased by 250 per cent. since 1979.

One can see the massive impetus that has been given to the leaked document. That is why various Conservative Members have come to their point of view, as was made clear in their speeches. The Government will start with the privatisation of invalidity benefit, which is clearly on the cards. I do not think that any hon. Member would try to deny that. They will then move to unemployment benefit, and with the insecurity of time—I say insecurity because it will not be vouchsafe for the Government to implement it—they will even look in due course at privatising the old-age pension itself.

For the Labour party, and for all parties, really—although I was surprised by some of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), who tried to associate new Labour with the policies of the present Government—that is totally unacceptable. We are not defeatist about our country. We are not pessimistic about it.

We believe that there are still things that can be done to get the welfare system to promote employment instead of being merely a safety net. We must recognise that, if we continue to regard it as such—passive, there just to support—it will never perform its proper function, which is to be a spur to employment. Only by promoting policies in that direction will we ever be able to afford it. Clearly, if the Government continue with their present policies, it will be impossible for us to do so.

Lastly, we must remember that we owe it to taxpayers, who have to pay for it. They do not want a passive system that merely supports a very heavy social security burden. They want us to ensure that we put it to productive use and get down the cost of the system as a whole. That is what we should aim to do. With that in mind, the Labour party has made a number of proposals, many of which still need to be costed and the details worked out, but at least we are considering it. We have not given up on it. Indeed, we believe that we can do it.

Let us take one example—youth unemployment and the long-term unemployed. I think that the House will agree that those are two evils in society. They are things that none of us would like to live with or be part of. None of us likes having to pay for them, and neither does the country—but they exist, and provision is made for them. Unless we tackle them, they will not get any better.

That does not just mean paying for them. It does not mean trying to make the savings that the present Government are trying to make. It is about tackling them at the core, to come up with proposals that will lead to people moving out of welfare and into work. That is why we came up with proposals for youth unemployment, to which the Government immediately say, "How are you going to fund them?"

Mr. Stephen: What are Labour's proposals?

Mr. Robinson: If the hon. Gentleman cannot read, I am sorry. If he does not want to read them, I understand that, but the proposals are quite clear. I am not speaking to the hon. Gentleman; I am speaking to the House, most of which is better informed than the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Stephen: Come on, tell us what they are.

Mr. Robinson: I am coming to them. Do not worry. Keep calm.

We have made it clear that we shall fund our proposals for youth employment from a very modest levy on the privatised monopolies, which is all they are. The programmes will be directed at getting youngsters back into work.

Mr. Stephen: How?

Mr. Robinson: We will pay a subsidy to private sector employers. Many distinguished private sector employers welcomed our proposals only last week. We have made it clear that they can have a role with the voluntary organisations on the same benefit. We have made it clear that they can be part of our youth employment plan for

the community scheme as a whole. We have made all these things perfectly clear. We believe that they can greatly benefit the youth unemployed.

I ask the hon. Gentleman to reflect on one simple fact: in many inner urban areas, in London in particular, black youth unemployment can be as high as 60 per cent. He might believe that that is acceptable, that it is something that, in the quiet of his conscience, he wants to live with, because he is defeatist and he has been there far too long—we all know that—to do anything about it; but for us it is not an acceptable position.

Mr. Stephen: Of course I believe that there is a problem with youth unemployment. Every hon. Member knows that. What I do not believe is that the Labour party has any constructive policies to do anything about it, and all that the hon. Member has said is just the vacuous nonsense to which I referred in my speech.

Mr. Robinson: The vacuous nonsense was the hon. Member's own speech, and because it was such vacuous nonsense, he could not understand anything in it or after it, and he still does not want to. We have heard no proposals whatever from the Government or Conservative Back Benchers. We have to live with what we have and make peripheral savings where we can, some of which may be welcome—I shall not comment on that at the moment—but nothing goes to the heart of the problem.

The next thing we say is that we must provide opportunities to upgrade skills for all those who are in employment, but, as I have made clear, it must be a two-pronged attack. We have to believe that we can improve our economic performance and not just accept decline in the way in which current Government and Treasury thinking do. We need measures that improve economic performance.

That is why we continue to place overriding emphasis on two aspects: first, investment and the overriding need for it; and, secondly, improving skills. We have set that out in document after document, and in policy statement after policy statement. We await the opportunity to enact them.

Why do the Government do nothing about the poverty trap? It is more in individuals' interest in so many cases to remain on benefit than go to work. That is not something that has just happened in the past two or three years or in this Parliament. It has been growing and getting worse over the last decade or more. Yet the Government still cannot find any innovative or imaginative policies do deal with it. Why not? Because we all know that they are tired, worn out and without ideas. *[Interruption.]* I challenge the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) to give us a single idea for dealing with the poverty trap. I shall willingly give way, but he does not have one, so he will not rise.

I now come to the personal tax and benefit rates of people at the lower end of the scale. I happen to believe that, at the top end, one cannot impose penal tax rates. I think that that was a mistake. *[Laughter.]* I agree, and I have no personal interest. I do not necessarily believe that they should stay where they are, and that is a view that I can present on another occasion, when we discuss tax policy.

Equally, I do not believe that we can expect people at the low end to accept in effect 80 per cent. marginal tax rates, which can occur in some situations. That is why we have come up with a series of proposals to restructure the tax system to give a much greater incentive to those who are at the bottom end.

Those are our policies. They are clear, they are coherent, and they address the heart of the issue. We want to deal with the long-term unemployed, youth unemployment, the poverty trap, the enormous disincentives of high marginal tax rates for those who are at the bottom end of the scale. We say that because the structure of work and employment in this country have so radically altered, which, in themselves, probably have nothing to do with the Government over the past 20 years.

In the past, long-term unemployment was rare. It was hardly known. Jobs were long-term. Jobs were pretty much at standard rates. It was largely men who were at work. Each one of those definitions of the economic situation our country was in some 20 years ago has quite dramatically changed over the last period of the Government in office. I do not attribute that to them, nor do I try to blame them for it. What they have to be blamed for, however, is not realising what is happening and adjusting their policies to take account for it, and to have left us now with the heavy burden of a welfare state that is not attuned to the needs of those who are living off it.

We believe that we can change that. We do not think that our proposal amounts to the dismantlement of the welfare state, which is what the Government want, or that it will lead to its privatisation. What it must lead to is its modernisation. On that, of course, the Government have given up the ghost—and the sooner they give up office, the better.

5.59 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am not so sure about all that. Again and again, it comes down to perception and reality. I am not certain whether we have sunshine and apple pie, but if we listen carefully we can hear the thunder—and a great deal of fudge from the hon. Member for Coventry, North–West (Mr. Robinson).

It is a shame that Labour Members are concentrating on documents leaked by potential Labour candidates rather than looking at the reality of the social security budget, which has been hurtling towards £100 billion. The extra costs imposed on taxpayers are already running at an enormous £15 a day for every working person. We must get to grips with the budget—and that is exactly what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been doing since he took up his post, with the full support of not only all Conservative Members but the 92 per cent. of people who are working and paying taxes. Those people expect the Government to spend their money responsibly, and to ensure that they are not paying too much.

As we know from announcements already made, we shall be curtailing social security expenditure by £5 billion by the end of the century, and by £15 billion by 2030. The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) said that there was no crisis and no need to worry, but we must act now to ensure that we do not waste money that we should be passing back to taxpayers. We must not put that off for another 10 or 15 years, as the hon. Lady seemed to suggest.

Ms Lynne: I said that it was time to plan now, but not to panic. I wish that the hon. Gentleman would get my words right.

Mr. Evans: Now is the time both to plan and to act. No one is asking us to panic. If we waited until the time when the hon. Lady suggested we would start to act, we would be in a panic—and so would every taxpayer who opened his wage packet and discovered how much extra money the Government were having to take for non-essential social security spending.

As I have said in the Chamber before, I hope that there will be no changes in expenditure on child benefit, especially for those whose children—16 to 18-year-olds—are in further and higher education. We want to encourage such youngsters to take advantage of further and higher education. If changes were made, thousands of them would be affected, in all our constituencies. They would be deterred from attending schools such as Clitheroe Royal grammar school in my constituency, and sixth form colleges.

Seven million families receive child benefit for 13 million youngsters. More than 1 million of those youngsters would be affected if child benefit were taken away from them. The last thing we want is for the Government to raid the child benefit kitty to save money so that it looks as though they were being careful. Youngsters who could not proceed to further education could be damaged for life. We should encourage them to take up the opportunity. In effect, a tax of £560 would be levied on all those 16-year-olds, and a tax of more than £1,000 would be levied on 16 to 18-year-olds in further education.

If we accept the principle that child benefit should be taken from that age group, we are attacking the very soul of the child benefit system that has proved so effective over the years. If we accept that principle, there is no reason why child benefit should not be means-tested—or, indeed, removed from children in education per se and replaced by some form of income support. Is this the real agenda behind some of the proposals that we are hearing from Opposition Members?

Currently, 72 per cent. of 16 to 18-year-olds stay at school; in 1979, the figure was only 59 per cent. The number of youngsters with unskilled parents has risen from 20 per cent. in 1979 to 56 per cent. The hon. Member for Coventry, North-West talked of a skilled and educated work force. Would it not be a tragedy if some of those youngsters were denied the opportunity to stay in education just because their parents could not afford it, and if those parents ordered them to go out and get a job irrespective of how low paid it was?

For many families—especially low-paid families—child benefit, as a percentage of their incomes, is far more important than it is for those who earn a great deal more; but they would be hit. The "nearly poor" would be hit. The hon. Gentleman spoke of the poverty trap. If his party implemented its proposal, a fresh poverty trap would be created for many families with youngsters wishing to proceed to further and higher education.

I know that not all Opposition Members believe in the policy. Not all of them believe in clobbering 16 to 18-year-olds and their families. They must speak now: they must not remain silent. During today's debate, there has been a conspiracy of silence among Opposition Members who are not prepared to make real spending commitments. From so many of them, it has all been apple pie and sunshine, but we need to get to grips with real commitments from the Labour party. We need to know exactly what its spending pledges are. There is no point in being presented with a menu with no prices; we need to know all the items and all the prices, so that the public can be made aware of what lies ahead.

One justification that has been advanced for withdrawing child benefit from 16 to 18-year-olds taking advantage of further and higher education is that a number of people benefit who ought not to—youngsters in private schools, perhaps, receiving the sort of education that is frowned on by Opposition Members. Those Opposition Members fail to recognise that a number of youngsters who attend private schools have assisted places, or are receiving bursaries or grants. It would be spiteful to damage such education and deprive youngsters of it.

It is no wonder that the Child Poverty Action Group is against the Labour party's proposal. Child benefit as it is currently paid has proved extremely beneficial and effective. Labour's proposal would mean a tax increase of 5p in the pound for families during the two years in which their youngsters continued in full-time further education.

When we are considering ways of reforming the welfare state, we should not attack child benefit for 16 to 18-year-olds. We have been very productive in saving money in other areas. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have mentioned fraud, and I agree that we need to get to grips with that problem, but we are talking about expenditure of more than £90 billion. Various estimates are thrown around about the true level of fraud—it has been estimated at between £2 billion and £9 billion—but paying more attention to the problem would certainly pay greater dividends, and would have the full backing of the public.

The telephone number on which people can ring the Department of Social Security when they know that fraud is taking place should be more widely available. Every pound saved in that way can be targeted more efficiently towards those who desperately need benefits, or returned to those who paid in the first place—the taxpayers. I hope that more benefit claimants will use identity cards bearing photographs, so that they can show that they are entitled to benefit.

Housing benefit has been mentioned time and again. It seems to have gone completely out of control. More checks are needed on claimants to ensure that the money goes to those who genuinely need it. We must end the scams that we read about in the newspapers, in which thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money is ripped off every week by people who ought to be put away rather than allowed to steal money from taxpayers and those who deserve benefit.

We have again heard much about all the wonderful sights that Opposition Members expect to see if the nightmare happens and the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) gets his hands on the key to No. 10. We want to control expenditure through the reforms that have already occurred in the social security and welfare systems, but we also want as much encouragement as possible for the economy to grow. I think that is what the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West spoke about. He is a business man, and if he

took an honest, stark look at the proposals by his leader, he would see that they will merely add to the welfare system and the social security budget.

The social chapter, the 48-hour directive, a minimum wage and the differentials that people would start to claim would have an effect. It is not just a question of £4 or £4.50, or whatever the figure per hour would be, because differentials would grind their way through the system. No wonder the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) has talked about a massive shake-out in the economy if a minimum wage is introduced. That will be the real problem.

Germany has more than 4 million unemployed, France has more than 3 million, and in Spain youth unemployment is about 30 per cent. Those are horrific figures and, if we introduced Opposition policies, unemployment, which has been falling dramatically for over two years, would go up again. That would add to the social security budget, and we would have to turn yet again to the taxpayer and ask him for more money to dole out to other people.

We need to take measures that will continue to attract inward investment. Deregulation must continue, so that businesses are able to flourish, take people into work and use some of their profits to train the work force and invest in people, which has been particularly successful. Those are the measures that we should take, but we have heard drivel from Opposition Members about policies that would increase the social security budget. We know what the Opposition stand for, because they have not changed their spots. New Labour would mean new spending and new taxes for everybody.

6.12 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): This is a more serious debate about an extremely serious subject than might be deduced from speeches by Conservative Members or from the general attitude that they have displayed.

At the start of the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) spoke about the reality of poverty and inequality in Britain today, and there was an immediate response by Conservative Members. One of them piped up that at least the poor were richer than they used to be. He had no sooner closed his mouth than another said that at least the poor were not dramatically poorer than they used to be. Another Conservative Member tied himself in statistical knots trying to prove that poverty does not exist in Britain, that it is all a matter of definition.

In terms of complacency, smugness and dismissiveness about poverty, Conservative Members should be utterly ashamed of themselves. I remind them about the reality of poverty. Some months ago, I had the privilege of attending the national poverty hearings which were organised by Church Action on Poverty. They were held in Dean's yard and were different from any hearings that I had ever attended. They were attended by about 300 leading figures. As well as hon. Members, there were leading churchmen and heads of national charities—the sort of people who normally talk about the poor and make decisions about them. However, on that occasion, they were there not to talk but to listen, because on the platform were poor people from every corner of Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland.

One by one those people described what it is like to be poor in Britain in the 1990s. Almost any one of those contributions would have shed light on our debate, but one sticks in my memory. It was made by a disabled single mother on income support who lives in an inner-city area of London. It is the usual sort of poor area to be found in inner cities throughout the country and they are characterised by poverty, crime, vandalism and drug taking. Her son had special educational needs but, because her local education authority was strapped for cash—or should I say starved of cash by the Government—it could not meet her son's educational needs other than through its residential budget.

The woman was told that, if she wanted her son's needs to be met, he would have to be taken into local authority care and put in a residential home. She explained to the meeting that she had no choice; that she was a concerned mother who wanted the best for her son; and that the only way she could get that was to put him into local authority care. Her son was very young and she described how difficult it was to explain to him that his mother was putting him into care, forcing him to live in a local authority home.

Of course her son did not understand why his mother was turning him away and putting him into local authority care, and she spoke about the damage that was done to the relationship between her and her son. She was not describing a scene from a 19th century novel by Charles Dickens or from a third-world country but speaking about what is happening in Britain here and now. She depends on the welfare state and is not worried about its cost: she is worried about how poor it is at looking after people.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): What kind of mother would push her child out into care and not want to look after him at home? Even if she could not give him the best of everything, she should still want to care for him, and the welfare system would help her to do that. It is a travesty for the hon. Gentleman to give such examples.

Mr. McAllion: If the hon. Lady had come to the national poverty hearings and had taken the trouble to listen to poor people, she would understand what kind of mother that woman was. She is a caring mother who cares about her son, and she wanted the best for him. She was forced into her action by people such as the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends in government. She should not try to talk down the poor. This country has too many people like the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends.

I am trying to get Conservative Members to understand what we are debating when we speak about poverty. At the heart of the debate is the cold question whether we can afford the welfare state in its present form—whether it is sustainable and affordable. In his tawdry contribution, the Secretary of State said that the central issue facing every developed country was the reform of the welfare state to make it affordable. There is nothing new or surprising in Tory Ministers making such statements.

Hon. Members have mentioned the infamous Treasury kids whose document expresses the unthinkable—the break-up and the privatisation of large parts of the welfare state. There is nothing new in that document, because the break-up and privatisation of the welfare state has begun. That can be seen in the private finance initiative in the

[Mr. McAllion]

health service. A whole new generation of privately owned and privately managed hospitals will replace the existing network of NHS hospitals if the Tory party is re-elected to government.

Future health services will be delivered by private companies profiteering on the backs of contracts that have been taken from NHS hospitals. That is already happening, and the kids in the Treasury do not have to write about it. The Government are doing it at Stonehaven in Scotland, for example. There is competitive tendering throughout the health service, and swathes of the NHS are disappearing into the private sector. Privatisation of care for the elderly proceeds apace in every part of the country. Local authority homes have been forced to shut so that elderly people can be transferred to private-sector nursing and residential homes where the workers and the cost of care are cheaper.

The jobseeker's allowance is the latest in a long list of Government changes to deprive the unemployed of benefits to which they used to be entitled. In the Government amendment, the aim is

"to seek positive and imaginative ways of ensuring that the welfare state continues to be both effective and affordable".

That sentence could easily be replaced by a sentence which said, "to seek ways of privatising the welfare state." That is exactly what it means, and that is what the Government are about.

It is often forgotten that arguments about the affordability of the welfare state are as old as the welfare state itself. There have always been fainthearts who argue that the country cannot afford a welfare state. At least those who argued that back in the 1940s had more weighty arguments on their side than those who argue it in this day and age. For example, last week, during the debate on the economy, the Chancellor told the House that the British economy was now entering its fifth year of economic expansion. He said that living standards were rising, unemployment was falling, output was up, inflation and interest rates were low, investment prospects were good and profits were up. In other words, everything in the economic garden was rosy.

This afternoon, at Question Time, the Prime Minister said that the country is in the best economic circumstances that we could hope for. Yet, having been told about that prosperous economy, suddenly we hear that we cannot afford the welfare state that we have had for the past 50 years.

Let us compare the allegedly favourable circumstances that we now have with the circumstances that faced the Labour Government who created the welfare state in 1945. At that time, John Maynard Keynes described the circumstances as the equivalent of a financial Dunkirk. During the war, Britain had lost a quarter of its entire national wealth—a loss estimated at that time at £7,000 million. It had sacrificed its export trade, which was down to £400 million in 1945. It had been forced to sell off many of its overseas assets. At the same time, it was required to import goods costing £1,200 million a year just to maintain wartime levels of consumption. It faced a vast burden of overseas indebtedness—£1,750 million was owed to Egypt, and to India and other Commonwealth countries. It faced a balance of payments deficit which was estimated at £1,200 million over the first three post-war years.

The Labour Government inherited a country and an industrial and economic infrastructure which were ravaged by war and geared for war. They faced massive problems of demobilisation and reconstruction which no Government have had to confront since. To cap all that, the lend-lease agreement with the United States, which was worth £1,350 million a year, was suddenly cut off after victory over Japan.

History would have understood if that Government, facing those economic problems, had backed off from their commitment to establish a welfare state. Far from backing off, the Labour Government went forward even more enthusiastically in their determination to do that. Let us remind ourselves of the scale of the changes introduced. They introduced not just a social revolution but a socialist revolution.

That Government introduced a free and comprehensive national health service to be funded not out of insurance but out of general taxation. They rehoused millions of displaced people through a public programme of new and renovated housing. They introduced a comprehensive national insurance scheme for sickness, unemployment and old age, all based on a clear principle of universality. There was a 44 per cent. increase in the basic rate of insurance payments, a new maternity benefit, the scrapping of the six-month limit on unemployment benefit, a new benefit for widows, old-age pensions above the levels recommended by Beveridge in his report, industrial injuries benefits which were 70 per cent. above existing levels, and a new system of national assistance to help the poorest and most vulnerable groups in society.

In the best of economic circumstances, it would have been a difficult task to introduce those changes, but that Labour Government introduced them in the face of the worst economic circumstances imaginable.

We are often told that the golden rule of borrowing is that the Government should borrow only to invest and never to finance current expenditure. It is often described on both sides of the House as "spending wisely". I thank God that nobody had heard of that rule in 1945, because the welfare state into which I was born and from which I and many millions of others have benefited was created by that Labour Government's determination to build on the back of borrowing. They negotiated a multi-billion dollar loan from the United States Government, and, on the back of that loan, established the national health service, launched the massive house building programme and set up the comprehensive system of social insurance from the cradle to the grave which is so familiar to many people in this country today.

I am not suggesting that today's welfare state can be sustained simply by increasing levels of borrowing. Public borrowing is already out of control because of the Government's incompetence. In present circumstances, it would be economic and social madness massively to increase the level of borrowing. However, I suggest that, if today's Government showed the same political will and determination as that Labour Government in 1945, new solutions, appropriate to our times, could be found to fund the needs of the welfare state. I will mention just a few of them.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does my hon. Friend concede that one of the greatest problems facing Britain today is the vast gap between the rich and the poor and the fact that, according to OECD figures, it is the fastest growing gap between rich and poor in any

industrialised country? Does he agree, therefore, that what we need is increased Government income from a higher rate of taxation for the very richest within our society?

Mr. McAllion: That is a fair point, and I was about to come to that.

Nobody would suggest that taxation should be increased for the vast majority. It has already been increased to penal levels by the Government. What about the small minority who have grown fat on the tax cuts of the 1980s? The richest tenth of the population have seen their real incomes increased by 61 per cent. through the 1980s and into the 1990s. Under a fair and progressive tax system, would it not be right for those people to start to pay out more of the wealth that they were given for nothing during those years? Would it not be right for the redistribution from the poor to the rich that occurred under the Tory Government to be reversed under a Labour Government through the medium of the welfare state?

I am being told that I should finish, so I do not have time to outline the other ways that could be used to fund the needs of the welfare state. There are other— *[Interruption.]* If the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People wants to speak to me afterwards, I will be happy to give him further details. However, he should not get too near me. For once, I have realised the value of the red line on the Floor of the Chamber that keeps me apart from Tory Members. Some of the comments that I have heard from Tory Members today have been so incendiary that it is lucky that they were a good distance away from me.

The intellectual climate in which these debates are held is important. One of the things that we are often told is unrealisable today is what is known as equality of outcomes. It is no longer meant to be practical to argue that in this society we can afford equality of outcomes for everybody or that we should all get the same share of the country's wealth. We are told that there should be equality of opportunity, which allows for inequality of outcomes. That is the Government's argument, but I cannot agree with it.

I am from Scotland, and one of my heroes is Jimmy Maxton, the red Clydesider, who was one of the greatest Members that the House ever had. Throughout his career, he wanted to see a welfare state established in this country. At the end of his career, he was asked, "What does socialism mean to you?" He said:

"Socialism means nothing to me if it does not mean that as I have a house to live in, you also have a house to live in; that as I have food to eat, you also have food to eat; that as I have education, recreation and leisure, you also have education, recreation and leisure."

Jimmy Maxton had never heard the phrase "equality of outcomes", but that is what he was talking about. That is what the welfare state is about. Nobody in this society should be denied the benefits that come from the wealth that is generated. It should be shared as fairly and equally as possible. We want to see a welfare state that begins to put right the wrongs that have been done over the past 17 years. That will not happen unless there is a change of Government and, thank God, there will be a change of Government soon.

6.18 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I should like to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on his determination to see that the £90 billion that we spend on our massive welfare programme is correctly spent. I welcome his stringent attitude to his job and compare it favourably to the sloppy, sentimental and patronising attitude of the Labour party to people who depend on welfare in one way or another. The Labour party treats them as if they are somehow different from the rest of humanity, are unable to look after their lives and manage their affairs and must be treated as wards of the state.

I remind the Opposition that charity begins not only at home, but in the home. It is the Government's duty to foster the citizen's responsibility for looking after his own family. That includes elderly relatives, many of whom are cared for and loved by their families and are not left to languish and depend on the state. It also includes responsibility for children as they grow up and when they leave school and start looking for work.

When I left school, I did not expect the state to support me. I regarded it as my duty—so did my parents—to find work. In those days—which were not all that long ago—young people expected to take jobs on modest wages which enabled them to contribute towards the family budget. We should be nurturing such a society, not one that allows able-bodied people to languish on welfare, contributing nothing to the general budget of the country.

There are far too many examples of that. The Opposition may call it the poverty trap; in my opinion, welfare is too generous in allowing people to remain in what is technically defined as poverty. One of the most sensible remarks that I have ever heard was by the Chief Rabbi, who said that poverty should be a vale of tears through which people pass, not a land in which they dwell. The Opposition seem to wallow in the idea that people dwell in poverty. They treat it as if it were their constituency.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Gorman: No. I do not have sufficient time.

The Opposition always back up their remarks with extreme examples of hard cases and then suggest that we should make laws accordingly.

In my constituency, I meet young people living in subsidised accommodation provided by the state. I have met hairdressers who do not want to work because they get only £50 a week and have to rely on tips, and young men who trained as chefs but gave up work because they did not want to work unsocial hours and they could live on the welfare state. Such behaviour is wrong, and we have to wipe it out.

In particular, we have to deal with fraud. In one minute flat, I want to mention three examples that I hope my hon. Friend will address. First, more than one case of fraud involving birth certificates has been brought to my attention. People working in the welfare system identify children who die soon after birth, but have been registered. They obtain copies of their birth certificates and, 15, 16 or 18 years later, use those certificates fraudulently to obtain benefits for themselves. They are defrauding the system of millions of pounds.

Secondly, people are fraudulently claiming carers' allowances. Their elderly relatives are being cared for in institutions, but they continue to claim carers' allowances. Thirdly, there is housing benefit fraud, which has been addressed on a number of occasions.

[Mrs. Gorman]

My right hon. Friend is quite right to find ways of making the system more efficient. When the Conservatives took office in 1979, we took on a load of neanderthal nationalised industries that were making massive losses. They were over-administered and ineffectively run with featherbedding and other practices. If my right hon. Friend can do for the welfare state and the massive budget he handles what the Conservative Government did for those nationalised industries, he will have done the country a great service. I congratulate him on his efforts and ask him not to be too timid in facing down the Opposition.

6.33 pm

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): It has become almost customary to say that we have had a wide-ranging and interesting debate, but for once it is absolutely true. Speeches from hon. Members revealed the stark difference between the views of the Conservative party and the Labour party. The public will understand those views at the general election, when they will be faced with the choice between defending the future of positive welfare state and supporting the way in which the Tory party continues to dismantle and privatise it.

In reminding ourselves of the purpose of the debate, we make no apology for recognising the strand of thought that has flowed from the No Turning Back group, the Adam Smith Institute and other organisations with which the Secretary of State has some sympathy to the Treasury document entitled "Strategic Considerations for the Treasury". Ministers and Conservative Back Benchers have tried to rubbish the contents of that document by attacking an individual civil servant rather than properly addressing the issues in that report.

It is interesting that tonight Conservative Members have reinforced rather than allayed the fears that the document recognised. It is clear that the Government plan to tackle the economic decline identified in the report by the wholesale privatisation of the welfare state, affecting state pensions, insurance benefits, unemployment benefits and much more. In a nutshell, it is about dismantling and privatising the welfare state.

We do not need to go into further detail about, for example, "The Fortune Account" proposed by the Adam Smith Institute. As the document stated, it is not a welfare entitlement but merely a savings account. The benefit that it confers reflects the contributions that have been made; it is not a Government promise of a defined benefit. That demonstrates the Government's thinking on these matters.

The Treasury document also admits that, contrary to claims by the Secretary of State in his famous speech in Southwark cathedral, the poor have been getting poorer and inequality has been widening. There is considerable evidence—which Conservative Members have tried to undermine—in excellent reports by the Rowntree Trust, among others, and in the detailed examination by *The Independent on Sunday* only this weekend of the new and authoritative report by the United Nations that reveals that Britain is now the most unequal country in the western world. The gap between rich and poor is as great as in Nigeria.

Mrs. Gorman: That is stupid.

Mr. Bradley: The hon. Lady says from a sedentary position that it is stupid, but it is an excellent report of an authoritative study by the United Nations. No Conservative Member has even attempted to undermine its contents. *[Interruption.]* They can only mutter from a sedentary position that it is nonsense.

We shall hear more about that report and the Government's reaction to it. Statistics in the human development report published last week demonstrate that inequality has grown sharply under the Conservatives and that the poor in Britain now have to live on much the same incomes as their equivalent in Hungary and Korea. Are the Government proud of that?

Do the Government further recognise that the claim by the then Prime Minister, now Baroness Thatcher, in 1988 that

"Everyone in the nation has benefited from increased prosperity"

has proved not to be the case? Statistics show that the poorest people's share of Britain's national income shrank in the 1980s for the first time since the second world war. What is worse, their poverty deepened. The real income of the poorest tenth of the population plunged by 20 per cent. between 1979 and 1993, while the richest tenth increased their takings by 61 per cent. That is the real inequality that confronts our people.

What have the Government done about that? They have launched repeated attacks on vulnerable groups. They claim that it is all about targeting, but closer examination reveals that it is not about targeting but about reducing benefit to vulnerable people who desperately need it. I need only cite one or two examples, such as—

Mr. Lilley: When the hon. Gentleman gives us his examples, will he tell the House whether he proposes to reverse them, or whether he thinks that they are basically acceptable to a future Labour Government?

Mr. Bradley: What we are doing is showing clearly what the Government have done; that is the purpose of the debate.

Let us take an example. When incapacity benefit was introduced, the Government said that it would lead to better targeting, by means of a more effective medical test. Fine. Although we argued against the nature of the medical test, we accepted that there was a need to examine the way in which the benefit operated. Yet what did the Government do for the people who passed the new medical test? They cut the benefit to which they were entitled. Now we have two groups of people with exactly the same degree of disability who receive different levels of benefit—one group on invalidity benefit and the other on the new incapacity benefit. Is that what the Government are about?

Another example is the reduced earnings allowance, about which we have heard much today. Delegations have been to Parliament today, and I make no apology for bringing up the subject again.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I wish that, when my hon. Friend talks about reduced earnings allowance, he would use the old term "special hardship allowance". Conservative Members have implied that some form of

gratuity is being handed out to people, whereas those of my constituents who receive reduced earnings allowance are people who, as a result of working in coal mining, for example, contracted a disease, or were maimed, often in their early twenties, and who have had to suffer a lifetime of bringing up their families on extremely reduced incomes. The Conservative Members who have given us the benefit of their "Mein Kampf" fantasies should bear in mind that we are talking about people who have given their lives, and sometimes parts of their bodies, for the sake of the energy needs and the productivity of this country.

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that contribution.

What is clear about reduced earnings allowance is that its recipients were told that they would receive the benefit for life. That is what the documents told them. The Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans)—I see that he is in his place—said on Welsh television that, if people had documents to prove that that is what they were told, their cases would be re-examined, concessions would be made and the hardship would be addressed.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans) *rose—*

Mr. Bradley: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm tonight that he will do that—yes or no?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman has not carefully quoted what was said on Welsh television. In fact there are a few, and only a few, people with documents in their possession suggesting that the benefit was awarded for life. That should never have happened, although it may have been justified in a few cases. If there has been an official error, and loss can be established to have resulted from it, there is a scheme for compensation.

Mr. Bradley: I welcome the Minister's intervention. I understood him to have said that, if people who have lost the benefit can prove that they have a document saying that it was awarded for life, they can have it for life—and that is the basis on which we shall proceed.

What I have described are just some of the changes that the Government have already made. Now they are introducing a whole new tranche of changes, including the closure of the benefits line. It is interesting that the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) called for a new telephone line on fraud. We welcome that; we have been calling for it year after year, and belatedly the Government now intend to act. But surely it is perverse logic to close at the same time the line that gives people help. There is a need to root out fraud wherever it occurs, but people have entitlements, too.

The benefit buses that used to travel around the country are also to be withdrawn. They were another means of ensuring that people received their just entitlement, so the Government are reducing the information and help available.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said in his opening speech, now there is to be privatisation of the administration of child benefit, with all the problems—

Mr. Corbyn: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Bradley: No, I shall not give way, because I must complete my brief remarks.

It is not clear from what the Government have said why they have chosen child benefit—a benefit efficiently administered and well organised by the Benefits Agency, whose administration costs are only 2 per cent. In his opening speech, the Secretary of State did not tell us precisely what savings would be gained from privatisation of the administration of child benefit, and what safeguards would be introduced for confidentiality and other matters of accountability involving the work undertaken by the private service.

We do not oppose the idea of finding out where private companies could bring their expertise properly to bear on the administration of the social security system, but the Government are introducing the practice in pilot areas, so that private companies can cherry-pick the areas of work in which they believe they can make the best profit out of privatisation. That is not the way to proceed.

Similarly, the Government are to deny the poorest people the opportunity of using direct payments in future. That is disgraceful. The private utilities and other organisations encourage most of us to take out direct debits to help us budget, although many of us have the income to be able to organise our payments for ourselves; yet the people with the most meagre of incomes, who greatly need help with budgeting and the payment of bills, will be denied that opportunity by the Government. I urge the Secretary of State to reconsider that disgraceful act.

In the past, we have seen what privatisation without proper control or regulation means. We have heard many examples today, such as the way in which the mis-selling of private pensions without proper regulation has caused hardship and anguish to many people. We have heard similar stories about people who have taken out inappropriate mortgages or endowment policies, without having received proper information and support before the decisions were taken.

Let us consider one example of the range of costs that will be involved if everyone has to rely on private insurance. In January, an interesting "Panorama" programme showed what the real costs would be for families if there were no adequate and effective state provision. For example, life cover would cost £70 a month, plus £40 a month for critical illness insurance and £40 a month for health insurance.

Pension provision would cost £500 per person a month, or £1,000 for a couple. The cost of private education, about which Conservative Members will know more than I, would amount to £1,000 a month. If we add up all those costs, compared with the real, effective and comprehensive state provision, for many families they do not bear thinking about. They will not have adequate provision. They will not be covered. Not only will they fall through the safety net; the safety net will not be there for them in the first place.

That is why the Labour party will be committed to a proper welfare state based on sound social insurance principles, and why the message tonight is simple: the welfare state is not safe in the hands of the Tory party.

6.46 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Alistair Burt): At the end of the contribution by the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), one thing about which we were not clear is what sort of welfare state there would be under

[Mr. Alistair Burt]

the Labour party. What commitments have we heard the party make this evening to do anything about the matters that Labour spokesmen have raised with such indignation?

I intend to consider as many as possible of the points that have been raised in the debate, but first I shall say a little about the structure of the welfare state as we see it. The Government have faced up to the problems that have been mentioned by hon. Members on both sides of the House, which have produced a rising bill both for benefits and for delivering benefits.

Three years ago, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State initiated the current debate about the growth in social security expenditure, and spelled out the principles that should underlie an effective and affordable system. Such a system should answer today's needs, not some outdated idea of what people require. It should protect the most vulnerable and focus on those in the greatest need, while bearing down on fraud and abuse. It should encourage independence and improve incentives, it should be affordable, and its administration should be efficient and offer value for money. I venture to suggest that that is still an effective set of principles according to which we can consider the future of the welfare state.

Does the Labour party really believe that the welfare state can somehow stand still? Do Labour Members think that the rising cost of welfare, and the rising cost of administering it, can simply be ignored, and that the taxpayer should, and will, simply go on paying? Do they think that abuse can be heaped on us for what we are doing and are attempting to do with the welfare state, without any commitment about what they would do?

It is precisely because the Government did accept, and continue to accept, that we have a responsibility not to pass on an escalating bill to future generations, because we made the hard decisions, and because we took the risk of breaking new ground, that social security in the future will be affordable. That does not mean ignoring the needs of those who cannot provide for themselves. The Government remain committed to maintaining a safety net that will ensure that the poorest in our society are supported and protected.

Just as we recognised the need to contain the cost of benefits, so we recognised the need to maximise efficiency and value for money in delivering them. Our aim is to save about 25 per cent. of the current £3 billion cost of operating the benefit system—about £750 million off the taxpayer's bill—while providing a service that is as good as or better than the present service and, most important, without resorting to reductions in benefits.

Significant savings can be made from simplified, efficient processes and from making the best use of the most modern information technology. We believe, however, that the only way to ensure maximum cost-effectiveness and value for money is to open up the system to competition: providing efficiency incentives for in-house suppliers, enabling comparison of their performance with each other and with private sector suppliers and moving to private sector administration where that provides better value for money.

Some Opposition Members clearly think that we are rushing into that in the same way as they rush into ill-thought-through plans for the future—plans from which they, as the Opposition, have the luxury of being able to withdraw when they see that they do not work. On the contrary, we have a carefully planned strategy to move in a series of gradual steps towards a mixed economy of provision. We made a conscious decision to start with a relatively simple and straightforward benefit in child benefit, and we shall look carefully at the emerging results of that before we decide which other areas to consider for operation by the private sector.

I assure the House that there is no question of wholesale out-sourcing. There will be a pragmatic, step-by-step process, with testing and assurance at each stage, built on the principles that I mentioned. Out-sourcing will take place only where we are satisfied that there are real gains to be made, because the private sector can offer greater expertise or value for money. I should stress that that does not mean that we believe that our own staff have failed. We recognise that they have delivered many efficiencies over the years. We do not think that the private sector is necessarily superior in this, but we realise that it can offer expertise in process review and information technology, and has the capacity to make capital investment where it is needed to produce the best results.

There were a variety of fascinating contributions to the debate. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), whom we welcome as a recent product of the national health service, made a series of speeches that he will not mind if I characterise as real old Labour. It is noticeable that he does not always get the response that he wants from the Opposition Front-Bench team. He was challenged about what his party would do on the jobseeker's allowance, and no commitment was forthcoming. He spoke movingly about the pensions link with earnings, but he knows that his colleagues have not decided whether they are going to restore it. He will pray in vain for that.

The concerns raised by the hon. Member for Walsall, North were mirrored in other Opposition contributions. The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) spoke with his customary passion and warmth for the people he represents. We are all confronted in our surgeries by people whose experiences are radically different from our own, and we know how miserable and difficult people's lives can be. We are all concerned to find out what we can do to make them different. The only point that divides the hon. Gentleman and me is that I do not believe that means and resources are the only way to deal with some of the problems. The difficulties of the woman he met at the hearings could stem as much from administration problems in her home town, and how to deal with increasing costs and special educational needs, as from anything else.

How is the hon. Member for Dundee, East going to satisfy the problems of the woman he heard at the hearings, if he believes that it is all about resources, but the taxation policy supported by his hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North–West (Mr. Robinson), who said that he was satisfied with our policy on high-income earners and taxation, is to be the taxation policy for the future, and if the comments of the Leader of the Opposition today when he talked to local government—to the effect that there would be no new resources from local government from central Government—are true? They cannot be satisfied with Labour looking for the ever-empty pocket in the future. They have to be satisfied by the sort of hard and difficult work that we do to make

the public pound go further, to introduce the private sector and new ideas, to deliver better for the people whose lives are more difficult.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: For the record, I by no means said what the Minister implied. If only the Government were as concerned about incentives to work at the bottom end of the scale as they are about the top end, we should have some changes in the welfare programme to encourage those. Far from being satisfied at the top end, my views are well known and have been made clear elsewhere. Perhaps the Minister will now tell us what he proposes to do to provide incentives at the bottom end of the income scale—incentives for people to work.

Mr. Burt: The hon. Gentleman spoke with great warmth and passion about the existing tax situation for higher income earners, which I can well understand in the circumstances, but I accept what he said. The hon. Gentleman challenged us and asked what we were doing about the poverty trap and getting people back to work. Conservative Members gave him half a dozen examples of what we have done—family credit, the earnings top-up system, child care allowances, and the changes that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor made a couple of years ago, from which 750,000 people will benefit this year—but he did not seem inclined to be that interested in those.

To return to the hon. Member for Dundee, East, there is one way to satisfy the need for revenue costs in his constituency that he did not mention: the tartan tax. The views that he expressed, and the sense that I got from him of the sort of commitment that he wants from his Front-Bench team, ought to be read and understood by many people in Scotland, as an example of what he would really like to do if he came to office. Many voters in Scotland would get a real sense of what Labour control would be like, if the hon. Gentleman could have his way.

Mr. McAllion: Does the Minister not understand that taxes raised in Scotland with the consent of the Scottish people would help the poor in Scotland? That is why Labour is committed to giving a Scottish Parliament tax-raising powers.

Mr. Burt: We all want resources to be used to help the poor. I was pointing out that the hon. Gentleman's care and concern for his constituents cannot be satisfied, in his view, without substantially increasing taxes. He wants to deliver everything through the public sector. He believes that massive resources will have to be introduced to do the job. I do not get any sense of that sort of commitment from his Front-Bench colleagues, and I bet he wishes sometimes that they would speak with half the passion and concern that he brings to debates.

A number of my Conservative colleagues made useful contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth), in a good contribution which we shall miss for some time, posed the Opposition sensible questions about the future of welfare, but he got no response. My hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) mentioned the Opposition's unwillingness to declare what they would do. Interestingly, he mentioned new technology, which at one and the same time affects jobs, but gives the social security system challenges, in terms of delivering benefits and dealing with the future. He again mentioned the essential principle behind why we are opening up the social security delivery system to ideas from the private sector and to take more account of new technology.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), in his usual forthright contribution, again laid waste to the Opposition on child benefit, pointing out what we have come to know: whereas we have ideas to save money in administration on social security, the Opposition's only concrete idea for saving money has been to save £700 million from 16 and 17-year-olds who would otherwise have received child benefit. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his hard work in raising that issue.

In a fascinating contrast to the hon. Member for Dundee, East, my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) put another side of the coin when she gave her views of individual responsibility. In essence, there should be no difficulty of reconciling those views in a modern society. The individual has to have a proper opportunity to grow, to develop responsibility and to develop all his or her talents or abilities. That will not produce equality of outcome, but there is no reason why the individual, in pursuing his or her talents or abilities for best, should not also have a community responsibility, which need not always be delivered through the tax system.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) made a balanced contribution, which I much enjoyed. She was right to talk about not panicking about the demographic situation in the United Kingdom. The reason the Government do not panic is that we have seen ahead and planned for those changes. We changed the earnings link with pensions precisely because we needed to. There is no evidence that the Opposition prepared for the future in the way that we did.

We have had intermittent fun this evening with Labour's draft press release—a paper full of blanks into which can be inserted whatever one wants. I wondered what it reminded me of, and, having listened to Labour's Front-Bench spokesmen, I now know: it is their draft manifesto. Anything can be inserted into the blanks. Will there be a change of policy? Their answer is, "Don't know, fill it in later." Will they retain what they have just opposed in the House? Their answer is, "Don't know, fill it in later." That is Labour party policy, about which we have heard nothing. The Government have given a concrete demonstration of the future structure of the welfare state. It is well thought through and it will be properly funded. It is the best opportunity that the country can have. Vote for us; leave them alone.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 235, Noes 275.

Division No. 210] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Ainger, Nick	Barnes, Harry
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Barron, Kevin
Allen, Graham	Battle, John
Alton, David	Bayley, Hugh
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Beckett, Margaret
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*	Bell, Stuart
Armstrong, Ms Hilary	Bennett, Andrew F
Ashdown, Paddy	Benton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John	Bermingham, Gerald

Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Cunningham, Ms R *(Perth Kinross)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Miss Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staffs)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Orme, Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Ms Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, John D (Strangf'd)
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Hain and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas–Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Fabricant, Michael

Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Richard Ottaway.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the substantial progress made by Her Majesty's Government in ensuring that the welfare state continues to be affordable by focusing help on those with genuine need or entitlement; agrees that Her Majesty's Government should continue to seek positive and imaginative ways of ensuring that the welfare state continues to be both effective and affordable; supports Her Majesty's Government in striving to make the administration of the welfare state as effective and efficient as possible; notes that the Labour leadership is now criticised even by its own supporters for being vague and ineffectual on welfare issues; condemns the Labour Party's readiness to criticise people who do think radically about social security; deplores the Labour Party's knee-jerk opposition to the improvement of the benefit delivery system; and opposes the Labour Party's expensive and irresponsible plans for a new means-tested system Pension Entitlement and a flexible decade of retirement.

Voluntary Sector

7.14 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I beg to move,

That this House welcomes and applauds the massive contribution made by the Voluntary Sector to the lives of individuals and communities throughout Britain and believes that it is the responsibility of Government to nurture the sector while respecting the independence of charities and voluntary organisations.

It is a great privilege to open this important debate, which gives us an opportunity to celebrate the contribution of the voluntary sector to British society. I use the word "celebrate" deliberately because of the extent and diversity of the voluntary sector, its capacity for long-term commitment and innovation, its almost infinite variety, from large national organisations to the smallest local community groups, the vast diversity of interests with which it deals, from issues that affect a small number of individuals to issues that affect everyone in British society directly or indirectly, and because the activities undertaken by groups of individuals in association is a vital element in society, and the act of volunteering in itself is an essential act of citizenship.

Even that summary is inadequate, for, although we are dealing today with the contribution of the voluntary sector to British society, it also makes an enormous contribution to international affairs, particularly in the relief of poverty and distress, and does the painstaking work of helping communities in many parts of the world to develop the ability to help themselves. It can be argued that this in itself is of benefit to British society, because it is an important element in our nation's citizenship of the world. That also applies to organisations such as Traidcraft, which allows people to make consumer choices that respect producers in the third world, but which has increasingly joined with commercial companies to develop social audit as a way of accounting to all the company stakeholders for its performance.

However, it is the contribution of the voluntary sector to British society that we celebrate this evening. When I was asked by my right hon. Friend the leader of the Labour party to undertake a review of the relationship between Government and the voluntary sector, I thought that I knew a bit about the voluntary sector, having more than 30 years' experience of community activity at local level, Welsh level and national level, as supplicant for money, in grant-making in local government and in a grant-making trust in the early days of the Prince's Trust. My experience is similar to that of many other hon. Members, starting off with involvement in voluntary organisations through family, and later becoming involved through chapel, through the Scout movement and in other ways.

My perspective has changed a little in recent times. I have had discussions in the past two years from national conferences to specialised meetings, from gatherings in every region of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to local meetings such as the one that I had yesterday in Peterborough, a recent one in Loughborough and a meeting of black community leaders in Nottingham. From all those contacts, I am now convinced that I knew far less than I thought and that no one can possibly know the whole sector.

At this point, I should like to pay tribute to the immense amount of work undertaken by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey), who was appointed by my right hon. Friend the leader of the Labour party to work with me on the consultation, who has also attended meetings up and down the country, and who has brought all her own experience and expertise to bear on listening and sharing ideas with the voluntary sector and working out how Government and the voluntary sector can best work together.

We deliberately refer in our motion tonight to the responsibilities of Government in nurturing the voluntary sector. It is important for Government to understand that they cannot and must not start off with a blueprint for the sector. The role of Government should be that of a careful gardener, caring and sensitive to the effects of its actions rather than those of a builder bolting together scaffolding to create a fixed and rigid structure. That distinction is important for those who have not been involved with the voluntary sector to understand.

It is also not enough to praise the sector or even to value it. We need to understand it as best we can and to make the decision-making of Government more positive and sensitive to the role of voluntary organisations, for the sector is not just useful, but essential, to the health of British society. In many areas, the voluntary sector is sensitive to specific communities such as inner cities or estates where the Church may be the only professionally-led organisation in the resident community. The voluntary sector's contribution to difficult situations is often crucial to the community and its health.

There is a key role for voluntary organisations in building up people's capacity to work as a community, to develop their personal skills as individuals and to develop a leadership capacity in the community. Having worked in such settings and having been involved in the training of volunteers, I never cease to be amazed at how such gifts are developed over time and, conversely, how we fail to recognise and nurture latent talent within the community that is often beyond the reach of statutory organisations and Government, but can be reached by independent voluntary organisations. That is recognised in Labour's "Road to the Manifesto" documents, in particular our belief that

"Government does not have the answer to every problem; it must work in partnership with the private and voluntary sectors for the benefit of the public".

The voluntary sector is a key part of enabling people to

"shape their own lives instead of them being shaped for them in Government."

One of the most important commitments made in "Road to the Manifesto" is the promise of real opportunities for those in the 18 to 25 age group. That must involve the voluntary sector, particularly where there is disillusionment over previous Government offerings and schemes. That is often particularly the case in specific communities, and we are opening a dialogue with the black voluntary sector in order to build bridges and lay foundations for success rather than making the mistake of funding for failure, as it has come to be called.

It is important to recognise the need to include all sections in society when we seek to nurture the voluntary sector. We have already recognised that many groups feel excluded or operate outside the traditional structures and umbrella organisations, important though they are and vital as their services to the voluntary sector have been

over the years. We need to find a diversity of ways of debating issues and listening to the voluntary sector. That is the purpose of a number of initiatives.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford–on–Avon): My hon. Friend rightly draws attention to the extremely important contribution that voluntary organisations of black people make to our society. Does he agree that there have been problems with the new approach to contracting that we have seen in recent years, with the emphasis on project funding? That approach has tended to be to the disadvantage of black voluntary organisations, which typically commit themselves to generic causes that do not easily fit into the project model.

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend makes a good point, which is at the heart of the need for the sort of initiative that I am talking about. Many small, developing or new organisations find it difficult to cope with gaining access to structure funds, European money and major Government projects. Unless the infrastructure exists within the local community, many organisations will be accidentally excluded although their role is crucial.

With reference to my hon. Friend's point, we certainly need the support and involvement of black communities—people of Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities in inner cities and other districts—if access to opportunities to work and train are to hit the targets for those who need them most and if we are to rebuild a sense of community and inclusiveness. This point relates specifically to the initiatives that the leader of the Labour party, the shadow Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and others have put their hands to in seeking a positive commitment to the needs of those aged 18 to 25.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Due to the local government structure in Northern Ireland, voluntary organisations play an important part in the development of community education, training and employment in both the communities there. The voluntary organisations play an essential role in bringing the two traditions together, especially in terms of community education. Surely they should have some input into the distribution of European social funds, especially in community employment and training.

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is true that voluntary organisations can often, as in the case of Northern Ireland, make a significant contribution to bridging the gap between communities as well as supporting the infrastructure of a specific community. The situation in Northern Ireland is different, and we need to consider an example that involves the voluntary sector and the relevant Department of State achieving an agreement and compact on the way that they should treat each other. We need to consider that example of good practice.

The importance of building bridges and laying the foundations for success within all communities and all elements in the voluntary sector has been strongly reinforced by the extremely helpful interventions of my two hon. Friends. I am pleased with the initial response to the dialogue, which is demanding, but important and worth while. Government and local government must accept that the voluntary sector cannot always be a partner unless the infrastructure is nurtured. There are training and support needs that it is unwise to overlook when developing any strategy.

In recent years, there has been too much of an assumption that the voluntary sector can be stretched again and again, that core funding can be switched into project funding, that organisations can be told, again and again, to find tranches of matching finances. Such approaches have their place, but the infrastructure problems can be the greatest in the communities with the greatest need. Recognising that fact is essential for success—as in the examples that my hon. Friends the Members for Stratford–on–Avon (Mr. Howarth) and for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) have just mentioned. Applying for European and other funds can be beyond the capacity of small local groups, but it is in the local community that the needs and contributions of such groups can be crucial.

The national lottery has introduced new money into the sector, but Government and local government need to ensure that the infrastructure exists in the local voluntary sector to enable the communities that most need help to apply for and use the money successfully. Dialogue will be a key part of our further round of meetings in each region and nation this autumn as we seek to find how best to turn principle into practice.

We must recognise that there is a special role for the voluntary sector in rural areas, where the problems, needs and potential solutions are different. Like the problems of rural crime, the needs of rural communities and the importance of the voluntary sector have been overlooked too often.

None of those points means that the Government have to be soft or woolly-minded in their approach; they mean that the Government cannot take decisions for the sector, but need to work with it to do the best for voluntary organisations and those they serve. It is not good enough for the Government to say, as one Minister did recently:

"We value the voluntary sector—we want you to help us achieve our objectives."

The setting of objectives and the decisions on means need to occur together, in partnership.

It hardly gave the right signal when the Government shifted responsibility for the voluntary sector from one Government Department to another without the slightest discussion or consultation with the sector. The experts and civil servants were not asked and the move was undertaken without sensible consideration or planning. The move may not be the wrong one—like the Deakin commission, we believe that the jury is out, and the Department of National Heritage is currently on trial—but it was not the right way for the Government to act.

The Government took the right decision a few years ago when, reflecting a Labour decision, responsibility for charities in the voluntary sector was put in the hands of one Minister of State in the House of Commons—at that time, the competent and hard-working right hon. Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd). It does not give the right signal for the response to this debate to be given by a Minister who is not responsible for the voluntary sector—an issue that is dealt with by his colleague, Lord Inglewood, the Under-Secretary of State in the House of Lords.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid–Kent): The hon. Gentleman might like to reflect on the fact that the voluntary services unit—the co-ordinating group in central Government—was at its most effective when it was linked to a Cabinet Minister with a budget of his own, and that a Labour Government determined that it should be transferred and downgraded to the Home Office.

Mr. Michael: I am surprised by the hon. Gentleman's contribution. I have practical experience of the work of the VSU on the ground. I worked in the youth service, with probation officers and with others. I remember the unit's effectiveness under the last Labour Government. The hon. Gentleman must have been visiting a different planet between 1974 and 1979. Many good initiatives were taken during that time.

It is a pity that this has not been followed by a burst of consultation and discussion by the Secretary of State and that she has not seen fit to take part in today's debate or even to listen to it. It is an omission on her part, and it is extremely disappointing. *[Interruption.]* The mumbling and groaning from the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) is irrelevant to that point.

The Government's approach stands in stark contrast to Labour's approach. We have examined the relationship between the Government and the voluntary sector. We are delighted that the sector—through the Deakin commission, which was established by the National Council of Voluntary Organisations—is independent of the Government. The independent commissions and working parties in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have been undertaking a basic review of the sector's future. The sector is reviewing its own future, which is an extremely positive development.

This work helps to set the agenda for partnership in Government, to use the title of our own consultative document. I pay tribute to the skill of Professor Nicholas Deakin in chairing the commission and in steering through a significant review of the work of the voluntary sector in England. It has helped and contributed to the thinking that has gone on in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. I compliment the NCVO on its selection of Professor Deakin as chairman of the commission.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) hopes to refer to the useful and constructive manifesto that was drawn up by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action. I have had the opportunity to discuss the manifesto with the council. In September, I will join my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) to have further discussions with the voluntary sector in Scotland. In both cases, there are overriding considerations, such as how a partnership approach is adopted by Government as a whole. However, there are specific concerns, not least the different legal issues that arise in Scotland, such as the inappropriate application of the English case law definition of a charity by the Inland Revenue. We need to be sensitive to those differences.

More generally, there is the question of how Government Departments can act consistently and together, rather than expect the voluntary sector to fit in with the rigid requirements of departmental structures. We are looking at this across Labour team boundaries. For example, I shall be meeting children's charities with my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), who deals with children's issues in the health team, and with my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), the shadow Minister for youth in the education team, to discuss how the Government and the voluntary sector can co-operate much more effectively on issues affecting children and young people, including how we deal with offending by young people. We are doing this across the boundaries of the teams. In the future, we should encourage Departments to work across boundaries—there should be a greater flexibility which respects the nature of the voluntary sector and the issues with which it is trying to deal.

A number of other issues are being dealt with by my colleagues. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has given a commitment to easing the barriers to volunteering on those who are unemployed or on benefit. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn has outlined a local partnership approach to reducing crime and to tackling its causes, particularly in relation to youth crime, an area in which I have a great personal interest. The voluntary sector, local community groups, local government and the police should all have the opportunity to be involved.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) has been undertaking a major review of the lottery, including its impact on the voluntary sector and the way in which funds that are raised are distributed. That work will make a significant contribution to developing coherent thought on the positive outcomes of the lottery. My hon. Friend the Member for Walton, the shadow Minister for youth, has stressed the central role of the voluntary youth service and of voluntary youth organisations generally in the future of the youth service. This is extremely important, especially in view of the way that the youth service has been under attack and diminished by the Government in recent years.

I have referred to the initiative taken by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and a number of my hon. Friends on attacking and tackling the needs of the 18-to-25 age group. In each of these, as in the general thrust of policy, we come back to the matter of partnership.

"Partnership" is an easy word to use. Who is against co-operation and partnership? However, it is not that easy. Any partnership is tough, whether between individuals or between organisations. The nurturing of a partnership involves a long-term commitment on the part of the Government. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield has said that we should "say what we mean and mean what we say". We need to work out what "partnership" means and what mechanisms are needed to make it happen. That was firmly in mind when the Labour party, in clause IV, made the unique commitment to co-operation and partnership with the voluntary sector.

The approach of the Government to building partnership needs to be positive. However, it was not a Labour party member or someone from the voluntary sector who made this point most strongly, but a business man who was appointed to a quango by the Government. He said to me: "I can't understand the Government's approach to partnership. You can't go into a partnership with your mind made up, telling others what you want out of it. That wouldn't be accepted in business. You have to be prepared to work it out together."

That is the problem with applying a strict contract culture to the voluntary sector. If there is a top-down approach, as is too often the case, if voluntary

organisations are seen by the Government as little different to a group of private companies that are bidding for contracts, then it is not a partnership—it is the strong binding the weak; it does not have the creative strength of a genuine partnership.

This is a real worry, as I have seen a letter from a district auditor telling a local authority that all its relationships with the voluntary sector—including the giving of small grants—should be imbued with the contract culture. That attitude could undermine the relationship between the voluntary sector and local government, which is of crucial importance to local communities. In recent years, we have understood the tremendous pressures that there have been on local government—with the cuts in the finances available to local government, there has been pressure on the way in which they have reached partnership agreements and supplied grants to local voluntary organisations. That is bound to lead to pressure and to misunderstandings.

During the course of our regional meetings last September and October, I was reassured to find that, to a great extent, the voluntary sector and local government regarded each other as partners in adversity under the Government. It is an area of difficulty, but at least in some areas there have been real efforts to change it back to a positive relationship. I know that there were difficulties in the Manchester area. Manchester city council members specifically appointed a working party, chaired by the chair of social services, to look at how to create a new partnership with the voluntary sector in that city. I believe that positive changes have been made.

There have been various initiatives on the part of a variety of Labour authorities—from Islwyn to North Tyneside—in finding new ways of doing things positively in partnership with local authorities. Other authorities, including some in London and Nottinghamshire, for instance, have opened the books to the voluntary sector to try to share the problems faced by local government to see how to overcome problems and how best to work together.

Those proposals are very positive, but we need to ensure that the Government do not force people in local government or agencies to spend time chasing money. It is possible for a huge amount of paperwork to be generated which takes the key staff of small organisations away from the task of running the organisations—from working with the local community and people who need their services and concentrating on quality of service—and involves them in the continual paper chase to try to ensure that money is there for the following year.

Like many of my hon. Friends, I have had experience of that difficulty and it often undermines the quality of work. That problem is also caused by the move from core funding to a purely project-based approach. We need a strategic approach which recognises that voluntary organisations have to be healthy if they are to be able to respond to the challenges of changing society and to act as partners with government in meeting those challenges.

Certainly there has been a positive response to the statements of principle in our consultative document, published by the Labour party earlier this year, and a series of detailed and positive contributions have been received from a whole range of organisations. We are now digesting those contributions. We will consider the mechanisms of government and how to turn principle into practice. We need to find a way to define the relationship between Government and the voluntary sector, including agencies of Government and local government, to carry our principles through in practice to develop the partnership approach that I have mentioned.

One way to do that—to use language that is becoming common in Government—is to establish a compact between Government and the voluntary sector and to seek to replicate that in relevant detail within Government Departments and other agencies. The Deakin commission has also stressed the positive value of such an approach and mentioned the need for a compact in its recommendations.

I have had an opportunity to consider the compact in the strategic document drawn up by voluntary organisations and the Northern Ireland Office, to which I referred earlier. Of course, Northern Ireland has a different history and faces different challenges, but we should learn from that experience in, for instance, setting out how community care issues should be dealt with and the way in which the sector and Government should treat each other. There has been too ready an expectation by the Government that volunteers, carers in the family and in the community and the voluntary sector generally will pick up the pieces and fill the gaps. Often they do so, but they do so with resentment, because the Government have not worked with them as a partner to identify and then meet public need.

I commend the way that the three local government associations in England and Wales have worked with the voluntary sector to draw up guidelines on, for instance, ensuring that charitable money is not used to subsidise the public purse when a local authority seeks to deliver services through voluntary organisations. It is to be hoped that the new single local government association will build on those foundations. Central Government should adopt a similar approach, encourage their agencies to do so and reflect what has been done by the local government associations. I note that the latest Association of Metropolitan Authorities publication contains further discussion about quality and how to introduce quality into partnerships. It is promising that such issues are being pursued by local government.

As I hope I am making clear, partnership is not an excuse for inefficiency. As the business man I mentioned said, we need to work together. When the voluntary sector uses public money, we should seek ways to measure performance—together. We will encourage the Audit Commission to consider the ways in which partners in the voluntary sector and in government, locally and nationally, can set targets, minimise bureaucracy and find performance indicators that reflect their joint performance in meeting the real needs of the community.

The need for accountability and effectiveness is accepted by the voluntary organisations, which have often been pioneers in effective management, as they have in so many areas. Examples of good practice need to be shared, as with the Central Council for Jewish Community Services, whose imaginative appointment of Dr. Eric Livingstone—who is qualified in medicine and in the law—as an ombudsman has allowed independent resolution of complaints about and between different organisations.

In a meeting yesterday, the voluntary sector representative, from a group concerned with mental health, said that we need to challenge the voluntary sector.

[Mr. Michael]

It is the greatest challenge of all to be taken seriously, and we will look for value for money and for accountability to those who are served—when service to a group or community is the issue—but we will seek ways to undertake the evaluation together and to share both the purposes and the means of improving performance. The way in which the Audit Commission has increasingly worked with local government rather than outside it, addressing it as a partner instead of as a separate group of organisations, shows that that approach could work well in the overlap between Government, local government and the voluntary sector.

We will ensure that those principles, and the others set out in our document that I do not have time to detail tonight, will be put into effect across government under the oversight of ministerial task force, chaired by a senior Cabinet Minister. I welcome the arrival of Ministers on the road to Damascus, if the Government support our motion tonight, but I warn them that they are signing up to a tough approach. The voluntary sector needs to be helped to expand and develop, and it needs to be treated as a partner, or rather as a disparate group of partners with differing needs and contributions, but its independence also needs to be respected and, indeed, celebrated.

Some have suggested that the voice of charities should be stilled. Some Conservatives believe that charities should not bite the hand that feeds them, as though they were dependent puppies to be humoured. A similar conclusion was suggested by the Centris report, but we believe that such an approach is wrong in principle. In a democratic society, how can Government seek to silence a voluntary organisation working for the good of principles set out in charitable objects, if paid lobbying by those who have a commercial interest continues unabated?

If the Alzheimer's Disease Society cannot speak for sufferers and their carers, who can? Yet who best to provide targeted services on behalf of government? I do not seek to be specific about one society, but the example makes the point better than any amount of philosophical analysis. Our concern is given point and poignancy by the experience of my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes). I hope that the Minister will endorse the views that I have expressed on that point when he speaks.

I have not been able even to scratch the surface of the contribution made by the voluntary sector, or to list the issues that we need to address, far less to expand on the answers. For instance, I have not had time to discuss trusteeship, charity law or the definition of charity, which the Deakin commission suggested that the Government should try to tidy up. Incidentally, it will not pay to be too tidy, nor would the Government would be wise to embark alone on the task of writing a new definition, which might look simple but might unexpectedly cause a small earthquake in Peru. Each of those topics, and many more, deserve a full debate to themselves. However, I hope that I have at least indicated Labour's approach and the strength of our commitment.

I hope that the Minister will tell us something about the Government's approach that is of value to the voluntary sector. I hope that we shall hear an agenda for action, but I doubt it. The voluntary sector made a big commitment to the "Make a Difference" working party, for instance, and felt that the response from the Government failed to match its commitment and lacked enthusiasm. When we asked for documents that set out the Government's commitment to "think voluntary", my researcher met blank incomprehension across Departments until at last one small leaflet was found, which an official from the Department of National Heritage said was the only publication about that initiative.

The Government must do better. Volunteering is an essential element of citizenship, and access and recognition must be offered to those in work and out of work alike who provide voluntary activity. That can be done, as the Prince's Trust Youth Volunteers have recognised. The Government need to encourage and show commitment to volunteering by their employees and to exchanges, so that officials and Ministers develop the better understanding that is necessary for partnership. The Government should also encourage the private sector in the initiatives that have been taken by Business in the Community and many individual companies.

Above all, the contribution of the voluntary sector is crucial to the renewal of civil society and to restoring the sense of community that is at the heart of Labour's project. That has been recognised personally by the leader of the Labour party and the partnership approach is not only in the party's constitution, but it is at the heart of the road to the manifesto process, as Labour plans for government.

In proposing the motion tonight, we are setting on the record, in the House of Commons, our recognition of the massive contribution by the voluntary sector to the lives of individuals and communities throughout Britain and of the fact that the potential is even greater. We are acknowledging that the Government need the voluntary sector and accepting our responsibilities as a partner that we can look forward to fulfilling in government. We are recognising the responsibility of government to nurture the sector while respecting the independent charities and voluntary organisations.

It is a privilege and an honour to introduce the motion on behalf of the Opposition.

7.49 pm

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I am pleased to respond to the motion and to set out the Government's policies in relation to the voluntary sector, just as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are pleased to have taken on responsibility recently for Government policy on volunteering, the voluntary sector, the National Lottery Charities Board, charities legislation and community development.

The themes that I wish to bring out this evening are both the continuity of the Government's commitment to volunteering and the voluntary sector, and the change and development signalled by the move of responsibility for voluntary sector matters to my Department.

I shall begin by setting out what I understand the voluntary sector and volunteering to be about. It is a large sector: depending on definitions, there are perhaps 400,000 to 700,000 voluntary organisations in the United Kingdom. The sector includes about 180,000 charities in England and Wales registered with the Charity Commission. As the House will be aware, there is a wide range of voluntary organisations that do not meet the legal test necessary for charitable status.

Voluntary organisations are diverse, covering such areas as health, disability, housing, education and the environment. They are independent and they are very important. Voluntary organisations can often be far more effective and sensitive than Government at responding to needs. They may be far better than Government at injecting elements of user-involvement in the provision of services.

Voluntary organisations are a vital part of the national landscape. This is not mere hyperbole. To check the truth of the statement, we have to think only of a few of those organisations that are now more than a century old: the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the British Red Cross, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Salvation Army and the National Trust.

Equally important are the myriad of small local voluntary bodies, which are such a force for good in communities throughout the country. Indeed, they are perhaps more typical of the voluntary sector than are the well-known national charities. The great majority of charities have an income of less than £10,000 a year.

I turn specifically to the role of the Department of National Heritage. My Department seeks to promote the health of the voluntary sector and to encourage volunteering. It seeks, although one might quibble with the terminology, to nurture—to use the word that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) properly and effectively employed—the sector.

We have a broad-ranging programme of work, which I shall outline. It includes the promotion of volunteering, support of voluntary organisations by means of grants to membership, training and advice bodies, co-ordination of policy within Government through the ministerial group on volunteering and the voluntary sector, responsibilities in relation to the legal framework within which charities operate, and the national lottery, which is an unprecedented source of new funds for voluntary organisations. I shall take each responsibility in turn.

The Government's aim is to promote volunteering as an activity that can involve anyone and everyone in his or her community. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's "Make a Difference" initiative, begun in 1994, brought together a team from the public, corporate and voluntary sectors to draw up a strategy to demonstrate that volunteering is a worthwhile activity, and to suggest how volunteering opportunities might be made available for all those who wished to be involved.

After consultation with more than 300 organisations, the "Make a Difference" team brought out a report entitled "An Outline Volunteering Strategy for the UK" in June 1995. The report contained 81 recommendations addressed to the Government, to employers and to organisations that involve volunteers. The Government responded by announcing a package of measures worth £20 million over three years.

The crux of the team's strategy was the need to establish effective local centres to match volunteers with opportunities to volunteer. In many parts of the country, that strategy already existed through the network of locally funded volunteer bureaux, but in many other parts it did not. We have taken action on this by funding nearly 40 new local volunteer development agencies in areas where there was previously no such organisation. Their function is to increase awareness of volunteering and to promote opportunities to volunteer by working closely with a wide range of organisations, including schools, health authorities and local businesses, as well as voluntary organisations.

The aim is that, by the end of the three years, there will be coverage throughout England. There has been a similar response in the other parts of the United Kingdom. A national helpline has also been set up, so that volunteers can get information from wherever they are in the country for the price of a local call.

The "Make a Difference" team also drew attention to the fact that the young and old people are less likely to volunteer than those in the middle age groups. The strategy highlighted the need to encourage the involvement of the young and the older groups. The Government's programme includes challenge grants to encourage new and effective volunteering opportunities for both these age groups. Outstanding examples of organisations involving volunteers in the community, and of individual commitment to volunteering, are recognised by the Whitbread "Make a Difference" volunteering awards.

The Government's funding policy reflects the diversity of voluntary organisations and seeks to provide support that can reach across all parts of the sector, reaching both traditional, large organisations and small informal groups in cities, towns and villages throughout the land.

Dr. Godman: I readily acknowledge the Minister's responsibility, but may I remind him that the Finance Act 1987 introduced a payroll-giving scheme, which allows employees to make a tax-free donation or donations to charities up to a maximum of £1,200 per annum? Does the Minister agree that the time has come to increase the limit to, say, £2,400 per annum?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. It is certainly one that my Department will be considering in the context of the Deakin report. I shall be mentioning gift aid and payroll giving, which I take seriously.

I was saying that both large traditional organisations and small informal groups are targets in encouraging volunteering. By way of example, my Department funds the Women's Royal Voluntary Service, a large traditional voluntary organisation whose 140,000 volunteers carry out a vital role within the community delivering meals on wheels, serving in hospital shops and helping at the scenes of emergencies.

At the other end of the scale, the Department funds the national bodies that support the work of the local volunteer bureaux and councils for voluntary service, and in this way contributes to the welfare of thousands of local voluntary organisations. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I remain committed to continuing that support.

It is not only through grants that the Government channels financial support to the voluntary sector. Direct support from the tax system is also important. Last year, charities received the benefit of tax concessions worth about £1.5 billion, which constituted vital help to their work.

The Government have made it easier for individuals and companies to give to charity in tax-efficient ways. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow

[Mr. Sproat]

(Dr. Godman) mentioned payroll giving, which the Government introduced, along with gift aid, as powerful supports both to charities and to those who give to charity. It is the value of these programmes and tax concessions, as well as the legitimate interest of the public in how charities spend the money that they are given, that makes it so important that charities are accountable.

Mr. Rowe: One of the most valuable innovations has been the give-as-you-earn scheme. However, the advance of the scheme has somewhat disappointed its devotees. Perhaps my hon. Friend will either assure me that I am out of date or give an assurance that the Department of which he is such a shining light will do everything that it can to extend and improve the scheme.

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend is certainly not out of date. He has raised a matter that we shall be considering closely. The Deakin report, to which I shall come, provides us with an opportunity to consider a range of interlocking subjects applying to charitable giving and volunteering in general.

Another element of our work is the ministerial group on volunteering and the voluntary sector, which is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage. That group brings together at ministerial level representatives of the many Departments with an interest in voluntary organisations, to try to ensure that policies and action are consistent—not standardised—and that Departments work well with voluntary organisations and volunteers.

The Deakin report was published on 8 July. The work of the Deakin commission was concerned with England only. Equivalent exercises have taken, or are taking, place in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The commission took a wide range of evidence, and produced a thoughtful report, which has important messages for many people associated with voluntary organisations and volunteering.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): It might be appropriate to mention that the Minister's former Aberdeenshire colleague, Colin Mitchell, died on Saturday. He was chairman of the Halo trust, an admirable charity that indulges in the dangerous work of raising land mines.

Will the Minister give an undertaking that that committee will meet the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, which is worried about the effects of the reorganisation of local government and it calculates that it is £10 million down as a result of the lottery? Will the appropriate body meet it and talk seriously?

Mr. Sproat: I was sad to see that Lieutenant Colonel Colin Mitchell, a former Member of the House, died at the weekend. I am sure that the whole House would wish to join in the hon. Gentleman's tribute, or implied tribute.

As for meeting the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, I cannot give any commitment on behalf of my right hon. Friend, but the hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable request, which I will pass on to my right hon. Friend with the expectation that she will be glad to fulfil it.

My right hon. Friend and I will be looking closely at the recommendations of the Deakin report on behalf of the Government. As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), it will give us a chance to consider the whole area of charities, volunteering, and volunteers who are part of the voluntary sector and those who are not. We take the matter extremely seriously, and I am glad that, just after my Department has taken over responsibility for that, we have the chance to consider a report which has studied the matter so thoroughly.

I come now to the national lottery. Any debate on the voluntary sector in Britain must deal with the impact of the national lottery. The lottery has provided charities and voluntary organisations with a major new opportunity. As the House well knows, charities and voluntary organisations are one of the five specific areas of good causes supported by lottery funds.

The National Lottery Charities Board has already awarded £318 million to more than 4,000 organisations, involved in a wide variety of worthy causes. But it is important to realise that the board is not the only source of lottery funds for charities and voluntary organisations.

More than half the awards made so far by the other distributing bodies—the Sports Council, the Arts Council, the National Heritage Memorial Fund—are to voluntary organisations working in sport, the arts and heritage. It is estimated that more than £800 million from the first full year alone of lottery ticket sales will go to charities and voluntary organisations.

Mr. Michael: The Minister makes a fair point about the direction of moneys, but will he acknowledge my point about the infrastructure needs and the difficulty of making detailed applications unless organisations have large resources, and that there is an issue there to be addressed?

Mr. Sproat: That is an extremely important issue. It applies to charities and small sports organisations which may wish to fund the purchase of kit and so on. Again, we shall consider that in the context of the Deakin report, but we are also considering it with regard to all the distributors of lottery funds.

It is certain that the national lottery has made a very positive contribution to the income of charities, but I come now to the difficult question whether the lottery has had a negative or positive effect on other aspects of voluntary organisations' income.

Mr. Dalyell: That is very important.

Mr. Sproat: It is.

We should face that fact squarely. The Conservative party has no interest in pretending that things are other than they are—nor, I am sure, do the Opposition. That is matter that we must consider. It was extremely difficult to gauge the effect in advance. The House realised that there was a serious problem here. It was decided that part of the lottery moneys should be given to charities in the first place, because it was predicted that they might find things more difficult as a result of the lottery.

The House will be aware that that was a concern of a number of charities and voluntary organisations when the lottery legislation was being debated. The Government responded by giving a commitment to monitor the incomes of such organisations following the introduction of the lottery.

The issue of charities' income is complex and uncertain. Charities and voluntary organisations are diverse, in terms of the size of individual organisations, their aims and objectives, and the means by which they are funded. Research in that area has to be equally sophisticated if it is to capture reliable information and allow reasonable conclusions to be drawn from it. We worked with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, and its sister bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, in planning the research. We announced the research last October, and it is being carried out on two fronts.

The main and more important element of the research will look at income trends. That involves analysing the accounts of more than 7,000 charities and voluntary bodies throughout the United Kingdom, and will cover a period from 1991 to 1992—three years before the introduction of the lottery—to 1996-97, the second full year after its introduction.

The data are being prepared by an independent company, and the work began in the new year. It will analyse changes in all sorts of income—donations, legacies, sales, investments and so on. That is inevitably a long-term study, and results so far have merely, but usefully, revealed trends in income in the period leading up to the introduction of the lottery, thus providing a benchmark from which any changes can be measured. Next year, we will have available analysis of the results of the first full year following the introduction of the lottery, with full results of the research available in 1998.

The other, and secondary aspect, of the research involves considering the results of a number of surveys which have been carried out into public giving and charities' income. It uses data from surveys such as the family expenditure survey and those carried out for the National Council for Voluntary Organisations by national opinion polls. That aspect of the research will inevitably be less definitive, as samples are smaller, and in general it will rely on secondary sources of information—in many cases, people's recollections of their pattern of giving, rather than on an examination of charities' accounts.

Some charities have certainly reported a fall in income since the introduction of the lottery. For example, Alexandra Rose day reported that the proceeds of its flag day in 1995 were 12 per cent. lower than in 1994. Others, however, are reporting an increase. For example, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children publicly reported an increase of £2.2 million on an income of about £25 million in voluntary donations in 1995. Still other organisations have reported an increase, but do not wish to publicise that fact too widely in case it has a damaging effect on their future fund-raising.

The picture is thus a mixed one, and is further complicated by the fact that charitable income may be affected by many factors, of which the lottery is, at most, just one. They range from poor weather on a flag day to the growth of Sunday trading. Fewer people may concentrate their shopping on a Saturday, as they traditionally did, and may now shop on a Sunday. Yet people making street collections still tend to go for the Saturday crowds, which are lower. I give that as an example of the complicated reasons why donations may fall.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Does the Minister accept that the family expenditure survey, although an excellent document in itself, is not designed to collect information about voluntary contributions to charities and voluntary organisations? In fact, it was quite inaccurate when it tried to estimate the amount that people spent on national lottery tickets, so it does not seem to me to be a very reliable source of estimating how much people spend on charity.

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Lady reinforces the main point that I was trying to make: although we take surveys as evidence, we build into our calculations the fact that those surveys are not always set up to calculate the amount, as the hon. Lady quite rightly said of the family expenditure survey, and in other surveys people remember giving more or less to charities, which then turns out not to be apparent from the income of the charity itself.

The hon. Lady is quite right to emphasise that it is difficult to get accurate information. That is why we are trying, by going back in our analysis to 1991-92, to get a proper benchmark in the years before the lottery, and then to get proper benchmarks on what is received after the lottery has been going for a full year, two full years, and to publish it. The House may then make its own decision on what it thinks is the evidence before it and the consequences that that evidence would appear to show.

As a further example of the genuine difficulties in interpreting surveys, the NOP survey, commissioned by the NCVO, suggested that the number of people donating to charities fell from 81 per cent. of respondents to 70 per cent. after the introduction of the lottery. On the other hand, the overall sums given did not decline in the same period, which suggests that those who are giving are giving more.

Furthermore, figures from the annual family expenditure survey, which the hon. Lady mentioned, suggest that the number of households giving to charities has in fact remained pretty stable—it has neither gone up nor down since 1993. We have to take the evidence and place on it what judgment we think is suitable.

It is thoroughly unclear whether, or by how much, charities' incomes have changed since the introduction of the lottery. It is even less clear what might have caused any change. After all, any new call on disposable income, including but not limited to the national lottery, could have some effect on charitable donations. The causes will remain an issue of continuing debate, but, once the results of the survey of charities' income are available, the facts of any change will be clear, even if the reasons are not necessarily clear.

The last important area of my Department's responsibilities that I shall describe is in relation to charities legislation and the Charity Commission, which supports and supervises charities in England and Wales. Charities are devoted to the public interest, and accordingly, have a privileged status and receive particular benefits, including tax relief, as I mentioned earlier.

The public support charities generously. Public confidence in them is therefore vital. The Deakin report has a number of important recommendations about the law on charities, and on management and standards. These will obviously need to be considered carefully. At this stage, all I wish to say is that the Government

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fully support the Deakin committee's view that the legal framework must be appropriate for the modern world and the role that charities play in it, and we shall consider with great care what Deakin has to say on the need for reform.

Public confidence depends on donors knowing that the money that they give is put to good use and for the purposes for which they give it. The parts of the Deakin report devoted to improving management and standards in charities will no doubt be taken to heart by voluntary organisations. The Deakin report has also confirmed the need for an effective independent body to oversee the charitable sector. That, of course, is the responsibility of the Charity Commission.

My right hon. Friend's responsibility is for the appointment of the charity commissioners, who are accountable to her for the overall efficiency of the commission. The commissioners are, however, independently responsible for their operational and policy decisions, and answerable to the courts.

Major reforms to the law regulating charities and the commission were contained in the Charities Act 1992, much of which was consolidated in the Charities Act 1993. Both Acts updated the powers of the Charity Commission—for example, to conduct investigations and to protect charitable property—and updated the requirements on charities—for example, by introducing a new charity accounting framework. That framework came into force on 1 March this year, effectively completing the implementation phase of the reforms.

It is important that charities should be accountable. Abuse is, fortunately, rare, but it must be tackled effectively, as must failures of administration. The monitoring framework set up by the 1993 Act seeks to achieve that, and it aims to do so without imposing unnecessary burdens on charities. The deregulation task force on charities and voluntary organisations made a significant contribution in helping to get that balance right.

Recommendations from the deregulation task force that were accepted by Ministers included the creation of a new light-touch regime for charities with income or expenditure of £10,000 or less—so that in general they are not required to submit annual reports or accounts to the Charity Commission, or to have their accounts audited or independently examined. For larger charities, the income or expenditure level above which accounts have to be audited was raised from £100,000 to £250,000.

To enable it to fulfil its new role under the 1993 Act, the Charity Commission has been undergoing its own transformation under the direction of the chief charity commissioner. The commission has progressively built up its support and advisory role to charities, and is putting in place new monitoring arrangements. Its investigative powers have been strengthened, and it has enhanced its policy division so that it can play a greater role in developing issues affecting the charitable sector as a whole. This all amounts to a significant modernisation of the commission's role.

Mr. Michael: I get the impression that the Minister is moving away from the Deakin report. He referred to the recommendations of the report, which were directed at a variety of organisations, including the Charity Commission and many organisations in the voluntary sector. The first set of recommendations were to central Government. Will the Minister say a little about the Government's response to those recommendations—specifically those directed to the Minister and his Department?

Mr. Sproat: Certainly. The hon. Gentleman is quite right. The whole concept of the concordat is central to one of the passages in Deakin, but we would like to consider it in more detail, for the simple reason that it is a very important recommendation.

It is also a very difficult recommendation. It is one thing to say that the Government must sign, but with whom in the voluntary and charitable sector would the Government sign? Although I am absolutely not rejecting the idea, we need to examine it closely. It is important to get things right in principle, and then to translate them into practice. That is what we want to do. We received the report only on 8 July, but we will look at that point, as well as the point about standards of management and accountability.

We are strongly aware of the importance of voluntary organisations and volunteering. A recent study by the volunteer centre of volunteering in eight European countries suggested that volunteering in the UK was significantly higher than in all the other parts of Europe surveyed—51 per cent. in the UK, as against 35 per cent. in Holland and 19 per cent. in France. The figures on individual charitable giving tell a similar story, with private giving accounting for 12 per cent. of charitable income in the UK, as against 7 per cent. in France and 4 per cent. in Germany.

Those are traditions that my right hon. Friend and I wish to foster. Furthermore, in the words of the motion, we accept the responsibility

"to nurture the sector while respecting the independence of charities and voluntary organisations."

8.18 pm

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): I very much welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the voluntary sector, because it is a rare opportunity for the House to consider this issue.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) and for Stockport (Ms Coffey) for their sterling efforts in raising the issue of the voluntary sector in the Labour party and throughout the country. Without being too sycophantic, I praise my right hon. Friend the leader of the Labour party for initiating the debate, because it is important that the Labour party involves itself in the voluntary sector, because, traditionally, many people outside the Labour party have not seen the party as being central to the voluntary sector. That is changing. It was never really the case that the Labour party was not involved in the voluntary sector. The consultation itself has involved some 2,000 people giving their views to the Labour party about the future of the voluntary sector.

I chaired the consultation session that we held in north Wales, largely because, as well as being the local Member of Parliament, for 10 years before I was elected I worked in the voluntary sector as a regional and a national officer with the Spastics Society, and later as a director of a drug abuse charity. I feel that for too long the Labour party has

allowed the Conservative party to occupy the high ground, given that Labour has been deeply involved in the voluntary sector at local level and is now developing a policy for the future.

The two parties differ on that—on the approach that should be adopted to the future development of the sector. If we all look at our constituencies, we will see the benefits of voluntary sector activity. For instance, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution is stationed in my constituency. Then there is Amnesty International, which campaigns for justice and fairness throughout the world. There are playgroups, organising play activities for young people; Oxfam, with its shops and campaigning activities; Crossroads, which provides support for carers; the cancer support organisations, the credit unions, the Women's Royal Voluntary Service, the citizens advice bureaux and Barnardo's. Every constituency contains many groups of that kind.

I am not referring only to traditional groups and major charities. Only last Friday, I opened a revitalised chapel in a small village in my constituency which had been built again, brick by brick, by a voluntary organisation that wanted to develop the environment. I never fail to be amazed at the level of support that there is for the voluntary sector and the principle of volunteering, and I note that members of the Labour party have been involved, actively and locally, in every activity in my constituency that I have mentioned so far.

The voluntary sector in Wales is a major source of activity and benefit. Many Welsh Members of Parliament recently received a copy of the manifesto of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, which clearly demonstrates the amount of voluntary activity currently undertaken in Wales. The citizens advice bureaux, for instance, currently provide 400,000 consultations in Wales each year. The volunteer bureaux recruit 8,000 new volunteers per annum. Pre-school play groups currently support 48,000 children. The housing association movement—which has not been mentioned so far—currently provides 46,000 dwellings for 75,000 people. Voluntary organisations in Wales own 177,000 acres of land, and own and manage 230 miles of coastline.

As has been said, there are 22,000 voluntary organisations in Wales, and staff value is estimated at some £2 billion a year in terms of the salary that staff would require if they took paid work. The voluntary sector provides 12,000 jobs in Wales, and raises £600 million in cash each year. It is a major source of activity, and it is important to our local community. People become involved in the sector because it gives voice to new and unrecognised needs—a voice that can change and raise public awareness. It provides new ways of meeting society's requirements, and enables people to participate in public life and fulfil the civic duty that their community demands. It also allows volunteers to develop skills and experience that will lead to personal fulfilment and, we hope, improve many people's employment prospects.

Despite the importance of the voluntary sector, I believe that the two parties have very different approaches to it. I do not wish to be churlish to the Minister, but I feel that there are problems to be dealt with. They are wide-ranging, but I think that many voluntary organisations in Wales and elsewhere agree that they should be addressed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth mentioned the "contract culture". The state seems increasingly to be trying to determine what voluntary organisations do by arranging for funding to follow contracts. We should also examine the campaigning roles of voluntary organisations. There is currently not quite a disdain, but a frowning on some campaigning work. My hon. Friend mentioned biting the hand that feeds voluntary organisations. There is concern about the level of campaigning activity—activity that, in my view, is vital to the voluntary sector. If the voluntary sector does not represent service users who are in need, often no one will.

The question of core funding also needs to be addressed. Many voluntary organisations—such as the one of which I was a director before I became a Member of Parliament—depend on such funding to undertake the activities that they perform so well. It is neither attractive nor interesting to campaign for photocopying facilities, secretarial support or help with the cost of telephone lines or rental payments in fund-raising, but such things are important to the success of voluntary agencies and their ability to meet the needs of their communities. We should stress the need to maintain and develop long-term core funding.

The Government's attitude to value-added tax impinges greatly on the voluntary sector, which still cannot claim back VAT on much of its expenditure. The fact that voluntary agencies must pay VAT on goods up front hits them hard. I do not want to be too disdainful of the Government's approach, but it is felt that, in many quarters, voluntary activity may be seen as a substitute for Government action, as opposed to an element in a partnership. That attitude needs to be challenged.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth said, and as the motion suggests, it is the job of Government to nurture the voluntary sector and to encourage voluntary activity. Those roles demand a re-think of the Government's approach, which I think Labour can genuinely undertake. We need to recognise the worth and value of voluntary organisations, and their commitment to genuine participation and involvement with Government and local authorities. I believe that Government's job is to establish a proper framework for that relationship to develop.

A number of aspects need to be improved, and the Welsh voluntary sector has pressed for such improvement. For instance, we should involve the voluntary sector more in consultation about the Government's activities. The sector can represent service users; it can represent those who are at the sharp end of Government policies, and it can assess the impact of those policies on the groups that it represents.

We should also consider the ways in which Government can encourage recognition of the importance of training, and of the ability of the voluntary sector to develop individuals as part of the encouragement of quality that the Government should be undertaking. Perhaps, when he replies to the debate, the Minister will tell us whether the Government are considering ways of increasing recognition of the qualifications of volunteers. Voluntary action could perhaps form part of a vocational programme, returning people to work but also enabling individuals to be recognised for what they have done. That is important, especially for unemployed people but also

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for retired people who may have retired early to contribute to the community. The Minister might also consider ways in which unemployed people could contribute.

I hope that the Government will consider a volunteer charter, which would put volunteering at the centre of community life and enable it to be seen as a mainstream activity encouraged by the Government. The Government could help to support the untapped wealth and activity represented by the voluntary sector. They should also consider extending the sharing of good practice: I refer not just to local authorities and health authorities but to the business sector. There are many good ideas in that sector, involving secondment, support and financial activities. The role of Government should be to help to support the voluntary sector to help to bring those good practice ideas together.

Finally, we should pay close attention to funding. Core funding is important but it needs to be established on a longer-term basis than currently. In my area, local government reorganisation has caused some uncertainty about long-term funding and it is important to look not only at core funding but at matching funding. Many voluntary organisations secure resources from the national lottery and from local authorities but require matching funding. For example, an organisation in my constituency has just received £750,000 from the lottery but has to raise £250,000 in the community to trigger that £750,000. That is a great deal to raise locally, but the worth of the project is established locally.

There is much support for the voluntary sector and much activity and initiative on its behalf and Labour will continue to be at the heart of that. There is more that the Government can do to pull the strands together, to look at ways of encouraging the sector and to assist it in doing what it does best—meeting the needs of local communities and having an independent, active campaigning role. I commend the motion to the House.

8.30 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) said, but over the years the Government have already taken on board many of the ideas that he has suggested.

Voluntary work plays a fundamental role in the minds of many Conservatives. The Government have a good record on this issue, as the huge increase in charitable funding and the increase in the size of the voluntary sector show. People who work for charities are highly motivated. The majority of them give their time for nothing and we could all give examples of excellent work carried out by local charities. As recently as a fortnight ago, I was working in my local prison canteen wearing a Women's Royal Voluntary Service hat.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I am sure my hon. Friend looked very pretty.

Mr. Brazier: I welcome that comment from my Kentish colleague.

I want to focus exclusively on voluntary work among young people. First, I shall deal with the administrative and regulatory problems that are faced by some organisations that deal with young people and, secondly, I shall speak about the cadet movement. While I am enormously impressed by the large number of organisations that do splendid work with young people, I am concerned about some of their administrative problems. Last year I was privileged to write a pamphlet with John Blashford-Snell, the explorer and well-known youth worker, about some of these problems.

Youth organisations face an extremely complex set of relationships with central and local government and with a number of overlapping co-ordinating bodies in the voluntary sector. I shall give a few examples. Answers to parliamentary questions suggest that the YMCA and youth clubs are getting small grants from the Department of Education and Employment, the Department of the Environment, the Department of National Heritage and the Home Office. One can imagine the amount of administration by the Government and, more importantly, by charities that is involved in getting money from four Government sources. However, the principal focus of youth activity is local government, and some organisations have to deal with several parts of local government.

In addition, there are three major co-ordinating voluntary organisations within the youth movement. There is Youth Clubs UK; then there is the organisation which used to be called the National Association of Boys' Clubs but which now has a much longer and more complicated title, as it sensibly also involves girls' organisations; and the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services. Those bodies all play a partial co-ordinating role and two of them assist in channelling money from the Government.

The complexity for an organisation that is trying to help young people of dealing with so many different organisations is difficult to exaggerate. The chief executive of one project said that he was dealing with no fewer than 10 organisations that were either governmental or wholly or partly funded by the Government.

Some youth organisations face another problem. In a sense the one that I have outlined is a problem of success: it is a welcome fault that so many parts of Government are involved in charity. I shall shortly make some proposals to make life a little simpler. The second problem is much more sinister and arises from our increasingly litigious environment. We all remember the recent story about the rugby referee who was sued for several hundred thousand pounds because of an injury sustained on the field by a player. He was covered by insurance, but many organisations are not fully insured or are not fully aware of the risks. In any case, I am not convinced that insurance is always the answer.

I have received an extremely sad letter from the headmaster of the school that I attended, Wellington college, which is famous for the leaders that it has produced over the years, especially in the armed forces. I was one of its least distinguished pupils. The gist of the letter was that it is becoming extremely hard for any headmaster to give responsibility to pupils. I have since had testimony from the headmaster of another school who wrote in the same vein. Surely one of the most important aims of any organisation for young people, whether it is a school or a voluntary organisation, should be to give young people responsibility. However, it has become increasingly hard to do that because of the risk of being sued if something goes wrong.

There is an almost circular argument. The point of giving people responsibility is to give them the opportunity to make mistakes. If there is no scope for making mistakes, there is no responsibility, but when QCs get hold of those mistakes in court, we can see where they will lead. In framing laws to deal with voluntary organisations and schools, it is important to consider the fact that we want young people to be given responsibility and that that will sometimes lead to mistakes.

We have a good background in trying to create a suitable environment for voluntary organisations. The voluntary sector is having a bigger and bigger stake in schools through local management and by way of grant-maintained schools, which have attracted pupils from a range of backgrounds. We have a terrific record by virtue of increased activity in the voluntary sector and the additional money that is available, not least from the national lottery.

We must address both problems—lack of co-ordination and the threat from lawyers—and we must do so imaginatively. I do not pretend to have the complete solution, but I should like to throw in three ideas. First, just as we now have a formal focus for charities and the voluntary sector as a whole in the Department for National Heritage, so it would be appropriate to designate a Minister to have overall responsibility for youth—perhaps the same person. That does not mean that he should tread on the toes of his colleagues in other Departments, but he should have a co-ordinating role in Government for policies that will affect young people. There is such a job in France and in several English-speaking countries—a Minister for Youth.

Secondly, the Government should try to reorganise the lines of communication. I understand that the interface with voluntary organisations is complicated and we do not want the Government to start nationalising them—that is the last thing that we should do if we wish them to remain effective. Nevertheless, it seems strange to have so many Government and non-Government bodies involved in co-ordinating the activities of voluntary organisations that deal with young people.

On good Conservative principles, it must be possible to achieve some mergers and amalgamations that will lead to a slightly less confusing picture being presented to the heads of youth organisations who are trying to get on with their projects and not spend too much time on administration. We must also give better legal protection against litigation to people involved in youth work. Nobody wants to encourage dangerous practices, but no head of a youth organisation or school should feel frightehed of being sued because they have given a sensible level of genuine responsibility to young people.

I should like to spend a few minutes discussing the cadet movement. In his remarkable book, General Colin Powell comments, as a young teenage black growing up in Brooklyn, about the impact of his introduction to the cadet movement at college. He said:

"My experience in high school, on basketball and track teams . . . had never produced a sense of belonging or many permanent friendships."

On joining the cadet force, he said:

"The discipline, the structure, the camaraderie, the sense of belonging were what I craved. I became a leader almost immediately. I found a selflessness within our ranks that reminded me of the caring atmosphere within my family. Race, colour, background, income meant nothing."

He said that they

"would go the limit for each other and for the group."

The cadet movement plays a unique and positive role in the life of this country. Some 150,000 young people take part in the sea, air and army cadets and the combined cadet force. They develop a sense of adventure, responsibility, team work and good citizenship. Having served as an officer in the Territorial Army for some 13 years—we have shared most of the centres in which I have served with cadet units, and often took them training with us—I have been constantly impressed by the terrific opportunities that the organisations provide for developing leadership, a sense of discipline and a sense of commitment amongst some of the most deprived young people in the areas. In many cases, it made a terrific difference to their lives in just the way that Colin Powell described so eloquently.

From the beginning of next year, there will be an exciting development in the cadet movement. For the first time ever in this country, the director of reserves and cadets—we will know who it is to be shortly—will be a reservist, someone from the volunteer reserve, instead of a regular general put into the post by the Ministry of Defence. That offers terrific opportunities for the cadets as well as for the volunteer reserves.

I hope that the Department of National Heritage will take an interest in the cadet movement. I was extremely excited to discover that no fewer than 14 cadet organisations—13 of them from the Navy—have managed to obtain grants from the national lottery for capital spending for their training centres. I was deeply impressed by my own sea cadet training centre in Whitstable when I visited recently, but I was concerned at the state of their building. I am encouraging my local cadet centre to get on with bids for national lottery funds.

The cadet movement plays a vital role for our armed forces and provides many high-quality recruits, but its wider value to the community is immeasurable. It is extremely important that, whoever is co-ordinating voluntary and youth policy within the Government—I cannot think of a better person to fill that role than my hon. Friend the Minister of State—should keep a watchful eye from outside the military establishment. When cadet organisations are competing with spare parts for Tornados or the latest piece of kit for a branch of the armed forces, the relatively small sums available to those vital organisations can be threatened. That is why the appointment I mentioned is so welcome, and why a watchful eye is needed.

I end where I began, by saying that voluntary organisations play a vital role in the life of our country. I have been involved with them on and off throughout my life—I did my first voluntary work from school—and I believe that they play a vital role in our community, especially in developing young people.

8.43 pm

Mr. Chris Davies (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Couched as it is in such general terms, surely no one will disagree with the motion tabled by the leader of the Labour party. We welcome and applaud the contribution made by volunteers to the lives of individuals and communities. Of course we should respect the independence of those organisations and, within

[Mr. Chris Davies]

constraints, we want the Government to nurture such organisations, or at least not to go out of their way to harm them, either advertently or inadvertently.

The questions for consideration are what role charities and voluntary organisations should be playing within our society, the extent to which they should be supervised and the degree to which they should be funded from the public purse. There is a danger of believing that voluntary organisations can, in some way, be neatly defined and packaged within some sort of administrative framework. I do not believe they can and I think that that is widely recognised throughout the House. They are too varied and too numerous. Sometimes, in my experience, they can be a little too varied and too numerous.

For example, in Oldham there is a great deal of enthusiasm for animal welfare, yet the shelter of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is in financial difficulties and there are divisions among those running another shelter. Despite that, plans are being made and funds are actively being sought for the promotion of two new shelters. One might hope that the individuals involved would pool their talents, but perhaps there is a risk in suggesting that, because it might curb the entrepreneurial enthusiasm of the volunteers involved—they are very committed people—in a way that might not be for the overall good. Freedom and flexibility must not be curtailed without good reason if voluntary organisations are to flourish.

There are said to be some 240,000 voluntary organisations in Britain working for public benefit, but there are as many as 1.3 million if one includes all the different societies, preservation groups and so on. In Oldham and Rochdale, the Council for Voluntary Service will say that in one borough—the two boroughs are almost identical—there are 300 organisations and in the other there are 1,200. It is simply a matter of definition.

Mr. Rowe: Underlying the debate is the assumption that every voluntary organisation is working for the public benefit. A substantial number of voluntary organisations are doing nothing of the kind, whether they be the National Front or a whole host of others. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the problems with the whole business of defining this difficult area is that what some people believe is for the public benefit, others believe passionately is for the public disbenefit? Would the hon. Gentleman care to comment on that before he continues with his interesting remarks?

Mr. Davies: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, who has hit the nail on the head. Fortunately, the debate so far has not touched upon that difficult subject and, since the Minister and the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman did not comment on it, I shall not do so.

As I was saying, there is a problem of definition. We can compare the attitude of groups in the receiving of public money. Voluntary organisations such as housing associations, which are almost entirely publicly funded, are in the voluntary sector and have voluntary committees of management. In practice, they work like professional landlords running a commercial organisation, although in most cases they are non-profit—making. Like many organisations which are dependent on public sector funding, they have felt the pinch of late because they have become totally dependent on public funds.

That contrasts with an organisation such as the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, which has always placed great importance on raising funds voluntarily so that a dependency culture does not develop. I can tell the House that, 600 ft up in Saddleworth, the RNLI's fundraising activities seem to be just as enthusiastic as they are at sea level. Voluntary organisations and charities spend vast sums of money each year—£15 billion by some estimates. Although they control and spend those huge sums, the payment of staff can become divisive.

Criticisms have been directed at some of our most well-known charities working in overseas development when their administrative costs are brought to public attention, yet how can organisations working in such difficult circumstances, handling huge sums of money and requiring full-time organisers with great expertise do anything other than employ full-time professional staff? After all, how many people are prepared to don the hair shirt and make the sacrifice of working for little or nothing for a cause in which they believe? Judging from the recent debate on Members' pay, perhaps we cannot expect too much of people working in the voluntary sector when we are not prepared to ask the same of ourselves.

It is almost a year since I was elected to the House and some nine months since I made my maiden speech. Umpteen contributions in debates, four Adjournment debates, two ten-minute Bills and endless defeats in the Lobbies have not yet dimmed my enthusiasm. If ever my energy wavers, I have only to listen to my opponents.

Like many hon. Members, I make sacrifices. I work long hours, and I have given up many leisure and outside pursuits. I also demand sacrifices of those close to me. When people ask me how many hours I put in as a Member of Parliament, I say that they should ask my four-year-old daughter how much time I spend with her—the answer is, not enough.

I never forget that I am in a privileged position, as I am paid to do a job I really want to do—voicing political beliefs and representing my constituents. Like every hon. Member, I am in that position thanks to the efforts of hundreds of unpaid helpers in the voluntary organisation that is my political party. I rely hugely—as we all do—on the support of those individuals.

I am also aware of the difficulties that can arise when the relationship is blurred between the professional and the amateur—the paid and the unpaid. There is no easy solution. Perhaps there is no solution. The same applies to the Olympic games, where there is no way of defining the difference between amateurs and professionals when they compete against one another.

Idealism is important in politics. If I lose my idealism or betray that felt by others, the support of my volunteer helpers will quickly fade away. Similar difficulties arise when a voluntary organisation performs a function that is considered to be the responsibility of a public authority.

Like the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), I recently joined the Women's Royal Voluntary Service for a morning to help out with meals on wheels. I went round Saddleworth with a local resident, Ron Bunting of Uppermill. Perhaps I should add that 10 per cent. of all WRVS volunteers are men. We went to see some of my constituents delivering the meals that had been provided by the social services department. I got a great deal of satisfaction out of those few hours of voluntary work. I hope that Mr. Bunting gets the same satisfaction out of

the one day a month that he gives to the WRVS. I enjoyed meeting people, although that is difficult to avoid when one is a Member of Parliament. It is almost a requirement of the job. I also enjoyed talking to my volunteer colleague, helping others and knowing that my tiny contribution enabled Oldham social services department to spend its resources on other useful work around the community.

When a voluntary organisation undertakes a specific task on behalf of the local authority, who is the professional? Is it the organisation—such as Help the Aged, which provides specific services for Rochdale—or is it the council which commissions those services? I find that impossible to answer. It is important for those in positions of public authority to recognise the expertise within voluntary organisations. That respect is all the more deserved because of the financial contribution that voluntary organisations make simply by extending the service provision beyond that provided by the public purse.

The worker voluntary organisations in Rochdale may cost some £2.5 million in public money, but are worth nearly £25 million—the equivalent cost had the work been carried out and paid for directly by the public authority.

Some 21 million people in Britain are involved in voluntary activities, but in my experience only a tiny minority are the movers and shakers who take initiatives, accept responsibilities and make things happen. Many hon. Members will be aware of the saying: if something needs doing, ask a busy person.

It is rather a shame that the character of Linda Snell in "The Archers" on Radio 4 is not entirely sympathetic, because the role she plays within that fictional community has always struck me as of great value to the village of Ambridge. In almost every community, a handful of people make things happen. We should give them every possible thanks and support. The difficulty is knowing how to focus that support in a meaningful manner. I commend the report of the independent commission on the future of the voluntary sector—the Deakin report—which explores many of the issues in detail.

If so many people have never made a physical rather than financial contribution to a charity or voluntary organisation, perhaps the Government could find ways of encouraging them to do so. The sense of purpose, of usefulness, sociability and companionship, all give satisfaction and pleasure to the people who become involved in voluntary organisations. If the Government could find a way positively to encourage more people to take the first steps towards getting involved in the first place, there would be long-term benefit to the community.

I conclude by asking the Minister to consider some particular matters. First, good organisation, a clear financial structure and proper accountability are essential to the running and supervision of voluntary organisations. Nothing destroys the credibility of such an organisation quicker than the mere whiff or suspicion of financial mismanagement. In England, the Charities Commission registers and supervises charities. In Scotland, there is no equivalent organisation and much less public accountability. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations has estimated that nearly 50 per cent. of voluntary organisations are unintentionally or deliberately evading the law. Perhaps the Minister would like to bring that to the attention of the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Secondly, voluntary organisations require continuity of funding and a longer-term perspective so that they can make longer-term plans and avoid the hand-to-mouth struggle for funding that so many have to endure year after year. If the Government intend progressively to reduce funding to a voluntary organisation, they should make that clear sufficiently far in advance, so that the organisation can make the necessary structural changes and adjustments rather than sinking ever deeper into financial mire before reaching crisis point.

My third point is about the European social fund and the concerns about it that have arisen over the past year or more. A letter from the Department for Education and Employment to the Oldham council for voluntary services says:

"A payment in respect of our final claim for the 1994 ESF programmes has been received from the Commission, but there is insufficient sterling to enable us to make all the payments due . . . Accordingly you will shortly receive a payment which will take your total grant to 95 per cent. of the value of your final claim".

The Department reminds the recipients of a condition attaching to the approval of their dossier to the effect that

"'all payments are subject to the . . . Department receiving full and appropriate amounts from the European Commission; the Secretary of State for Employment shall not be liable for any deficit in the grant which may arise'",

adding the words:

"At this stage we are still hoping that it will not be necessary to invoke this clause".

I hope that the Minister will accept that, although that may all be entirely legal and above board, the reality for voluntary organisations is that they are left being tossed around by the waves in a stormy sea, trapped between huge organisations—the Government and the European Commission. Some contingency funds should be made available to bridge that gap.

Finally, the Minister will know that, some years ago, the Government ruled out changes to charitable status. As a result, human rights organisations, community development groups and others are excluded from charitable status. It has always seemed to me ludicrous and appalling that organisations such as Amnesty International—I acknowledge the point made earlier about Amnesty by the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe)—cannot gain the full financial benefits of charitable status.

I hope that the Minister will consider how changes could be made to accommodate the needs of such organisations, which play such an invaluable role in a way that reflects all that is best and most decent and honourable in humanity. If an organisation such as Amnesty International is not promoting the public benefit, it is difficult to think of an organisation that is. I hope that the Minister will reflect on that point.

8.59 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I shall touch on a significant point that the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) made, but first I shall take the opportunity to raise briefly three separate but related issues.

First, I wish to use the debate to say thank you. In his opening remarks, my hon. Friend the Minister of State said that the number of voluntary organisations in this country was between 400,000 and 700,000, depending on

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how we define them. Most of those seem to be in Kent, which may explain why the Government Benches are dominated tonight by Kent Members. Most of those organisations—dare I say it?—seem to be in my constituency, doing God's work; I mean that literally.

I started an audit in my mind, and began to go through the voluntary organisations with which my constituency is blessed. It was an impossible task. I considered the Herne Bay end of my constituency, and thought of the Strode Park foundation for the disabled, and all the volunteers who raise money for that. Then there is the Queen Victoria memorial hospital's league of friends, and all the people who raise money for that.

We also have the Cabin Radio hospital radio organisation, which has been running for more than 20 years, and all the people who year on year devote their time to it. There are the youth organisations in the town, which I shall say more about later, and all the other people who donate hours and hours of their time to doing things for other people. All those are in Herne Bay alone.

Then I thought about the villages and the Margate end of my constituency, with the Royal National Institute for the Blind home at Westcliff house, the Royal School for Deaf Children, and all the people who support those. Then there are the parent-teacher associations, which are involved in a wide range of fund-raising events for schools.

I thought to myself that there cannot be a Member in the House who has not felt as I do, come Friday or Saturday night when my wife and I find ourselves getting dressed to go out for this week's helping of rubber chicken and Black Forest gateau, and thinking, "Oh Lord, do we really have to do this tonight?" Then we get there and find a room full of people.

For us it is just another event, but for those people it is their once-a-year day, and every person in the room is devoted to the cause for which they have been working all year. It could be the Red Cross or the St. John Ambulance, whose members turn out for all the fund-raising events for the other organisations to ensure that nobody gets hurt, and who do such a sterling job, or it could be the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Rotary Club or the Lions.

In Margate, we have the Winkle Club and the 12 Nails—organisations of which no one else in the House has ever heard, which raise funds and give money to charity for no other reason than that their members want to help people. On behalf of everybody in the House, I want to say thank you to all those organisations, especially to those who do things for the young people of our constituencies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) rightly talked about the magnificent work done through the cadet organisations—the Army cadets, the Navy cadets and the RAF cadets and, of course, the St. John cadets and the Boys Brigade too. Those are organisations from which young people learn comradeship, discipline and the roots of helping other people, and because of that become the volunteers of tomorrow.

A fortnight ago, I was fortunate enough to spend part of Sunday at the St. Lawrence cricket ground in Canterbury, watching teams of young people from all over Kent playing "Kwick" cricket. It was all run by volunteers—people doing things in their own time. Some of them were schoolteachers, some youth workers and some voluntary organisers, but they all turn out to encourage young people to do something constructive.

When we talk about young people, everyone thinks of drug taking, rock and roll, graffiti and all the rest of it, but an enormous number of them take part in voluntary, fund-raising activities. It is the kids who are out walking, swimming and doing a sponsored this or that to raise funds to help other people.

There are also the better known organisations, and every constituency has them. For me, the scouting movement—the guides and scouts—is epitomised by Ann Wells of the 1st Margate St. John's troop. Ann has been taking the underprivileged children of my constituency and the Isle of Thanet on summer camp not for one, five or 10 years, but for well nigh 40 years—how she has avoided the attention of the Patronage Secretary, I do not know—every summer, without fail, because she will not let those kids down. Those people are the unsung heroes of this country. When we are talking about volunteering, it behoves all of us to remember them and to say thank you.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House will know that in the tedium olympics of the House of Commons, I bore for England on two subjects—the media and the other is animal welfare—and you would be surprised, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I did not mention animal welfare organisations.

The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth referred to the sad demise of the RSPCA shelter in the Oldham and Rochdale area and of the efforts of others to set up a new shelter. I very much hope that Marc and Beverley Doyle will be successful in their fund-raising events. I am sure that he is trying to help them and, if I can help him to help them, I will be pleased to do so.

I have a concern which relates in part to some of the organisations on which I have touched and in part to the point that the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth made about the plethora of voluntary organisations—animal welfare organisations, in particular, but it goes across the board. With his new responsibilities, my hon. Friend the Minister should want to look long and hard at the work and powers of the charity commissioners.

I have a gut feeling—I suspect that it is shared on a cross-party basis—that there are far too many reinventions of the wheel in charitable work. As a consequence, too much hard-earned, hard-won and hard-sponsored money is spent on replication of headquarters, officers, typewriters, telephones and all the other things which together make up charitable and fund-raising work but which, by the same token, ought to be more co-ordinated so that more of the money goes right to the sharp end to help the causes about which we are all concerned.

In thanking people, I want to thank all the animal welfare organisations that do so much for animal welfare and contribute to the work of the all-party animal welfare group, which I am privileged to chair—in particular, the RSPCA and the National Canine Defence League, which provide the secretariat for Pathway—a group that is trying to promote the cause of people with pets who need housing.

People tend to forget that, when the British talk about animal welfare, they are talking about the relationships between animals and people. An enormous number of

people get immense pleasure out of their companion animals. There are organisations helping them—I am thinking in particular of the Pat Dog organisation, of which I am privileged to be a member. It is extraordinary to take an animal into an old people's home or a hospital and to see the pleasure that others gain from the opportunity to touch, feel or talk to that animal.

My second pitch to my hon. Friend the Minister is that, in asking him to seek greater co-ordination among charities, I would encourage him in turn to encourage the national lottery to make funding available to some of those animal charities that undoubtedly have suffered through lack of funds as a result of the introduction of the lottery.

Finally, I must do a little special pleading, and I must declare an interest. I have a godson—a lad called Nicholas, who is a keen sportsman. He has been diagnosed as suffering from a heart disease and, from being a very active sportsman, he has been told virtually overnight, "Stop everything or you may die." He is one of the lucky ones. I understand that between four and eight people a week—no one is quite sure how many—die suddenly in the prime of their lives. Very many of them are athletes and many die as a result of physical exertion because they do not know that they have a heart condition.

An organisation called Cardiac Risk in the Young, or CRY, seeks to promote the screening of young people—especially young athletes, but also the families of people who have suffered such bereavements—because it is believed that the disease may be congenital. My hon. Friend the Minister has a particular interest in voluntary organisations through the national lottery and sport. CRY has applied for national lottery funding. Those young lives could be saved. I urge him to be sympathetic to that appeal.

9.9 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): In debating the future of the voluntary sector, we are debating the nature of our moral community. Two principal schemes of social relations have been set forth over the years in our characteristic public debate: the bureaucratic and the market models. Both ideologies are attempts to provide for moral community and both are necessary, but even in better balance than they are now, they are insufficient. Each allows too much personal distancing, too many moral alibis.

A rich pattern of voluntary action helps to offset the limitations of both the state and the market. There is a range of human needs that the rights-based ideologies of the liberal state fail to acknowledge or succour: needs for belonging, giving, respect, dignity and care. Care in the community is an admirable aspiration and an admirable phrase, but it must fully mean what it says and not be a euphemism for a state and its agencies that usurp neighbourly responsibility or allow neighbours to escape responsibility beyond paying their taxes. If neighbours are strangers, truly there is no such thing as society.

In ascribing such limitations to bureaucratic systems, I do not intend to attack the welfare state. I deplore the disparagement of dependency. It has been a great civilising advance that people in time of need should be able to depend on institutionalised help; but if demands for efficiency and pressures to contain public expenditure are as great as they have become, there is a bleakness about the welfare state. It makes a vital qualitative difference if welfare state professionals do not have time to listen to the story of an elderly person or hold the hand of a dying one.

We lack adequately expressive political language with which to discuss such requirements of a good society. The terminology of civil society, fraternity, mutuality even, is archaic and fails to evoke with vividness and precision the multifarious and changing possibilities of human social engagement in our times. The Labour party is profoundly right to stress the importance of community and stakeholding. If those terms are liable to sound nostalgic or utopian, it is because they refer to a range of human needs that have been neglected for too long in our conventional political discourse.

Voluntary action goes beyond what the political can provide. We can and must facilitate and promote it, but we cannot specify in performance indicators and efficiency indices the

"little, nameless, unremembered, acts

of kindness and of love"

which are often in fact remembered but which transcend the limitations of welfare bureaucracies and market relations. It is not possible to guarantee through contracts that the packages of care that are to be bought and sold will be the genuine article and will truly be care.

Professor Deakin and his colleagues have written a splendid report on voluntary action that deserves our careful consideration. They take a synoptic view and analyse valuably the significance for voluntary action of forces of change: the retreat of the state from social responsibility; constraints on the funding of the welfare state; disillusion with conventional politics and the search for means to sustain civil society; the need to champion minorities in our democracy; the effects of widening inequality and persistent discrimination; the altering of family structures; and new technology and its impact on work. The Deakin commission invites us to heed a warning from the historian, Frank Prochaska:

"the voluntary sector is swimming into the mouth of Leviathan."

There was a turning point in 1990 when the Home Office efficiency scrutiny laid it down that, in their deals with voluntary organisations,

"Departments should establish clear policy objectives for any core or project grant or scheme relating to objectives in departments' planning processes. Grants or schemes which no longer relate to such objectives should be phased out."

With the implementation of that policy, we have seen the Government seek too extensively to capture the voluntary sector for their own purposes.

There can be no objection, of course, to the Government working closely with voluntary organisations, seeking to mobilise the resources of the community for clearly defined purposes that have been agreed in wide debate and insisting on value for money, but I hope that the Minister will agree that there are dangers in the new "contract culture". Those dangers are described in paragraph 2.3.7 of the report, where it refers to

"concerns about becoming over-dependent on local authority funding; anxiety that the quality of service to users might conflict with 'value for money' objectives and that competition may upset existing harmonious relationships . . . possible restrictions on

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advocacy and campaigning, problems of sustaining sufficient core funding, lack of freedom to innovate and excessive bureaucracy in monitoring of implementation."

The Association of Directors of Social Services has acknowledged those hazards. What matters is that Whitehall Departments, health authorities and local authorities accept that not only he who pays the piper should call the tune and that voluntary organisations are respected as independent partners pursuing a role complementary to that of the state. There is much matter on the relationship between local government and the voluntary sector for consideration by the new single local authority association for England.

I wonder whether the commission was wise to suggest, as it did, that there should be a new definition of charitable purposes and a new "concordat", as the Deakin commission calls it, between central Government and representatives of the voluntary sector. If a concordat established the principles that the commission proposed, it would be a fine thing, but we should not allow ourselves to forget that when Napoleon established his concordat with Pope Pius VII, he held him captive and took the crown from him to place it on his own head. Although I am sure we can be confident that the Secretary of State entertains no such folie de grandeur, we ought not to place such temptation in the way of Ministers.

The relationship between Government and charities in Britain has historically been a subtle and elusive affair. Wisely, the legislators of 1601, 1883 and 1960 forbore to define charities. Instead, the preamble to the Elizabethan statute itemised a range of highly varied, illustrative fields of charitable undertaking. Subsequent case law and administrative practice have built on that foundation, taking the Elizabethan examples as models to be paralleled in the altered circumstances of later ages. No doubt, in each succeeding generation, as in our own, the absence of clear definition has been found exasperating and the determination of legitimate charitable activity by reference to case law and precedent inhibiting. On the other hand, as the Goodman report observed in 1976,

"To define is to confine."

I think it is better otherwise. After all, in an important sense, our charities define us.

The Deakin commission offers Ministers a host of practical suggestions. Rightly, it praises the National Lottery Charities Board for its energy, care and effectiveness in its early work and its resilience in standing up to

"virulent, bigoted and even racist criticism."

I hope that the Secretary of State will respond to the suggestion that the National Lottery Charities Board should be allowed to support self-help and mutual aid groups and to delegate executive as well as consultative functions to its regional bodies.

I particularly hope that the Government, encouraged by the Minister, will consider carefully what the commission says about the benefits system and volunteering. It said:

"The benefit system rules must not be a constraint on the ability, especially of young people, to volunteer."

The Government accepted during the passage of the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill that in certain circumstances voluntary work could be classified as "exempt" work so that disabled volunteers would not necessarily forfeit benefit, provided that their work was within the 16-hour limit. However, the threat of losing benefit and the limiting effect on the hours of paid exempt work that a disabled person can do severely discourage voluntary activity.

Under the Jobseekers Act 1995, the Government have not conceded that voluntary work should be classified, in the jargon, as a "positive outcome"—something that is positively approved as a step towards re-entering employment. Under jobseeker's allowance, an unemployed person doing voluntary work must be continually available for work. That makes it harder for the individual to make a full or sustained commitment to volunteering. At least, as the commission proposes, the Benefits Agency should use the introduction of JSA this autumn to issue the most constructive guidance that it can to benefits offices.

Time prevents me from saying much that I would like to say. As the commission says, the Government need to take the voluntary sector seriously. They should see it as a partner in their quest to nurture what Beveridge called a welfare society and recognise the immense contribution that the voluntary sector can make to the quality of our social experience.

9.18 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid–Kent): As has become apparent in all the descriptions that have been given, the voluntary sector is, like Proteus, impossible to grasp—at least in a short debate. It is worth remembering that, like the rest of us, it is capable of distortion in the service of prejudice. Perhaps the most hurtful examples are to be found among religious organisations, whether in the marches and counter-marches in the name of religion in Northern Ireland or in the cruelties and terrorism of the different forms of Islam.

At its best, the voluntary sector offers the best opportunity we have in society of keeping a focus on whole people. One of the great problems for government involves the Haldane doctrine, which says that we should divide government in terms of function rather than in terms of interest. The Government find it almost impossible to see people as whole people; they see them as candidates for housing, for health, for education or for old-age pensions, not as whole people.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will remember that the danger of the contract culture, which has many advantages for the voluntary sector if properly defined, is that it makes it even harder for voluntary organisations entering into contracts to think across departmental boundaries and carry out the lateral thinking that brings people back together as whole people.

I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) about the plethora of organisations and their ignorance of one another. I once carried out a piece of research in three tiny villages in Fyfe and ascertained how many voluntary organisations there were. I presented my report to the three tiny villages in a village hall one night. The villages were all within five miles of one another and I shall never forget a man who stood up at the back of the hall and said that he had been working for a society for the blind in his village for the past 25 years and had had no idea that there was another organisation working for the blind five miles down the road.

We need to use information technology and the powers of the Charity Commission to put voluntary organisations in touch with each other. They do not have to co-operate and they do not have to like one another, but they should at least know that they are there and can work together if they want to.

There is a desperate need to look at the frontiers between public and voluntary provision. For the past five years, I have been a judge of the Barclay's "new futures" competition. Barclay's has given £6 million over five years to create a competition in which schools can bid for relatively small sums for their particular interest. One of the most depressing features of the huge list of bids is how many of them are aimed at making good the shortcomings in the school system; that should not be the case.

My remarks are disjointed because I am aware of the time limit.

I found it extraordinary that the Deakin report—so good in so many ways—made no mention so far as I could see of the 30,326 justices of the peace in England and Wales, the 4,233 justices in Scotland or the 20,569 councillors in England alone. We must not forget that those people are just as much volunteers as everyone else.

I stress that volunteering develops mankind. The Deakin report states:

"There is plentiful evidence that staff secondments, development assignments and volunteering in community activities enhances employee motivation, performance, loyalty and capacity for team work."

As the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) stressed, the voluntary sector is valuable in developing individuals. That is why I am passionately disappointed that the Government still have the extraordinary view that if someone who is unemployed sets himself to a medium-term piece of volunteering the benefit that he will derive from that is less than the benefit that he would derive from the often scarce possibility of taking a job that may not last more than a few days or weeks. I believe that that is a huge error.

The ownership of projects is vital, particularly for young people. This society of ours—which takes at least half our young people and keeps them in tutelage until they are at least 25 years old—has grossly underestimated the ability of young people to perform tasks, their desire to perform tasks and their need for support in performing tasks. Today we presented to the three main political parties suggestions from young people as to what might be considered in the party manifestos. The ideas sprang from a day in Coventry, about which I have spoken before. The key note of the day was that the young do not want to take over society, but that they want to be consulted; nor do they believe that they should have everything done for them.

The schools that have controlled bullying have done so by using young people. The local communities that have begun to make inroads into the drug culture have used young people as their ambassadors. Communities that have begun to build bridges between the older generation and other generations have given young people the responsibility of bringing older people back into the community. We underestimate the young people in this country and we do not give them the responsibility that they could take. Above all other things, the voluntary sector in this country should give young people the opportunity to define what they can do, give them the resources to do it and develop them into the sorts of people that they want to be.

9.26 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Hon. Members should congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) and for Stockport (Ms Coffey) on the tremendous work that they have done in this consultation exercise. I was privileged to attend a large meeting in Manchester some time ago, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton), at which we heard from a wide range of the voluntary organisations that operate in the north-west.

I am familiar with many of these organisations. Hon. Members will know from looking at the record of Members' interests that I have a connection with the Manufacturing Science and Finance Union, which has a huge number of members operating in the voluntary sector. These people are not just employees of charities and voluntary sector organisations, but an integral part of that sector. Many of those people are extremely well qualified and could command higher salaries in the private sector. They work extremely hard for those organisations because they believe in the ethos that has been described in the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth made the point—as was described in Labour's "The Road to the Manifesto"—that we do not believe that the state should take over this work, but that there needs to be a better partnership than exists at the present time. One of the issues—I hope that the Minister will take it on board, given his responsibility in the Department of National Heritage—is how, in partnership, we can create the funding opportunities using such mechanisms.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth referred to the national lottery. In my constituency, the local authority has put forward an imaginative scheme under the national lottery for the conversion of an historic building into a centre that can be well used by the voluntary sector. It wishes to get parts of the voluntary sector that have a synergy into the same kind of community so that they can help each other cut down on some of the administrative costs. The Minister should examine such imaginative schemes carefully.

There has been a long debate about which part of Government carries the responsibility for the voluntary sector. We need to recognise the enormous cross-departmental functions that are involved in supporting the voluntary sector and the Government should concentrate on breaking down the vertical, integrated barriers between Departments. Charitable money needs to be used effectively and I am sure that we all agree about that. Better long-term support should be given to some projects, instead of the short-term approach that is adopted at the moment. Applications for support also need to be considered carefully, because the procedures are overly bureaucratic at the moment and, indeed, the Minister acknowledged that in his speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth mentioned crime. Today, I received a helpful letter from the Cheshire constabulary in response to an inquiry that I made about the needs of a community that was being plagued by unruly youths. Cheshire police have

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adopted an imaginative scheme in which they are working with the voluntary sector to make available, during the summer months, a huge list of voluntary sector organisations that will all work with the police to support young people in that community. That type of partnership is a good illustration of what can be done.

Little mention has been made of the question of housing associations and I shall finish on that point, because I am aware of the pressures on time. The housing association sector is deeply troubled about the impact that the recent enormous changes have had. The Government should reflect on the quotation in Labour's policy statement on the voluntary sector from a senior figure in the housing association sector, who said:

"We grew so fast that somewhere along the line we lost our soul."

We must restore the soul to that important sector. I hope that the Minister will take on board many of the suggestions that have been made by people on both sides of the House.

9.32 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I welcome this debate on the voluntary sector because volunteering is an essential part of our community and it is one of the great characteristics of the British way of life. I have been closely involved with the Scout movement throughout my youth and for 10 years as a leader in the Scout movement. I have the honour to be the secretary of the all-party Scout Association parliamentary group and it is a sobering thought that one third of the Members of the House, on both sides, has been involved in the Scout Association in their youth.

I remind the House that we are talking about an organisation that admits youngsters, boys and girls, at the age of six to the Beaver section; at the age of eight to the Cub Scout section, which in many ways is the most enthusiastic age group numbering nearly 250,000 young people; at the age of 11 to the Scout section, the main traditional part of the Scout movement; and at the age of 16, to the Venture Scout section. Many of those young men and women go on to become leaders in the movement.

Some 648,000 young people in this country were members of the Scout movement last year, attending weekly meetings and participating in many activities in the open air in summer and at other times of the year. Worldwide, there are 25 million Scouts in 210 countries and it is worth remembering that two thirds are to be found in the developing world.

It is worth considering briefly the aim of the Scout movement—

"to promote the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual potentials as individuals, as responsible citizens and as members of their local, national and international communities."

All the good work achieved by the Scout movement takes place under the leadership of 100,000 dedicated volunteers. These are wonderful people who give up their spare time during the evenings and at weekends. They juggle the various demands of job, family and scouting. The movement depends upon the quality, commitment and enthusiasm of its adult leadership. Volunteers give their time freely to help the development of young people. All leaders must undertake training to equip themselves to do a better job. The movement's training programme has become recognised by professional trainers as one of the best of its sort.

Youth organisations, however, are vulnerable to applications from unsuitable people, including the irresponsible and the criminal, and from perverts. The Dunblane tragedy was very much an illustration of the potential threat to youth movements such as the Scout Association. The association is extremely effective with its vetting procedures. Any adult offering his or her services to scouting will be checked through the movement's well established vetting procedures.

Those procedures include checks to ascertain whether the applicant has had any contact with scouting in any other area of the United Kingdom and whether his or her record of service was satisfactory. Checks are made against all publicly reported cases of offences against young people. The local references that applicants provide are checked and there is a meeting with local scouting managers and the individual to ensure that he or she is suitable for the intended appointment. There is a system of continuous reporting and monitoring of all leaders.

In the light of Dunblane and other unfortunate incidents, the Government have responded to the problem of vetting. I commend the White Paper published by the Home Office entitled "On the Record: The Government's Proposals for Access to Criminal Records for Employment and Related Purposes in England and Wales". I hope, however, that my hon. Friend the Minister will reconsider the charging proposals. A charge of £10 per inquiry is a hefty burden for the voluntary sector of youth organisations. The Scout Association alone vets 50,000 potential leaders a year. The thought of £500,000 being spent in that way is a considerable deterrent.

There are many organisations with voluntary leaders. The sister organisation, the Girl Guides Association, is one. If the House will indulge me, I pay tribute to my wife, Patricia, who runs, often single-handedly a guide company. There are also the armed forces cadets. I highlight the Gravesend sea cadet unit, which has been displaced as a result of the Ministry of Defence building disposal programme. There are also the Boys Brigade, the Red Cross, St. John Ambulance and the Salvation Army.

When we take account of the work that is undertaken by voluntary organisations and individuals in other areas, such as care of the disabled, the elderly and the chronically sick, along with the work of victim support organisations and bodies linked to sports, conservation, not to mention the work of the citizens advice bureaux, every Member of this place will be aware of the excellent work done by volunteers in his or her constituency.

I have found, year in and year out, that each successive mayor of Gravesham, as he works through his year, comments on the way his eyes have been opened by the voluntary organisations that he visits and works with as called upon by the mayoralty. Their work has had a considerable effect on those who have been fortunate enough to be called to be mayors.

We all know that the National Lottery Charities Board has distributed £380 million to 4,600 charitable bodies. Of the funds distributed through the Millennium fund, half have gone to voluntary organisations. That is additional to the funds distributed by the Foundation for the Sports and the Arts. I want particularly to commend the grants

that have been made to organisations in my constituency, such as the Black Knights marching band of young people who have received money for musical instruments and the transportation of those instruments, the Jugnu Banghra dancers of the Sikh community who have received funds for their facilities, and the MEAPA gymnastics group which has received £250,000 for a gymnasium.

This debate has been of immense value, and it is a commendation of the work of our wonderful volunteers.

9.39 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I have been present for the whole debate, but I shall be brief. My wife, Patricia, is both a bailie and a justice of the peace, so I was pleased to hear the tribute paid to JPs and councillors, and presumably Scottish bailies, by the hon. Member for Mid–Kent (Mr. Rowe).

Along with the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), I have the honour of representing the House on the executive committee of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. I have to be brief, so I want to fire a couple of questions at the Minister. He may not be able to answer them this evening, but, given his usual courtesy, I am sure that he will write to me.

First, I was pleased that both the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) referred to the important role performed by voluntary organisations and community groups in Northern Ireland, especially at a time such as this. I am proud to be associated with the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, which plays a significant role in assisting people in both communities and, at the same time, in bringing together members of both traditions in various community activities.

Recently, NICVA commissioned a report into long-term unemployment in Northern Ireland from Professor David Donnison of Glasgow university. In fairness to the Government, I should say that, in response to a written question of mine on 17 July, the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), paid that report a fine compliment.

The Scottish voluntary sector has an annual income of £2 billion, equivalent to 5 per cent. of GDP, and it employs upwards of 40,000 people, who are involved in more than 50,000 forms of voluntary management. We do have problems, to which the Minister, again in fairness to him, referred.

We do not have a charity commission in Scotland, which is a matter for regret. I am not sure that we want the English regulations imposed on Scottish charities, but, as the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) said, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations has had to develop a non-statutory register, which has revealed that almost half of Scottish charities—around 10,000—are currently out of touch, and, to quote Lucy Pratt of SCVO, are

"either unintentionally or deliberately evading the law. The Scottish Charities Office, a Division of the Crown Office, will react to complaints about individual charities, but does not undertake routine scrutiny."

That is a matter for serious regret. There is a need, as outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), for the Scottish Office to work much more closely with the SCVO.

I recommend to the Minister the SCVO's recent report entitled "Scotland's Lottery". One of its recommendations states:

"Some of the estimated £500M the Government gains in tax from the lottery should be reinvested in advertising and in encouraging more planned giving to charities through Give As you Earn, GiftAid, covenants etc."

I said earlier that the upper limit of give-as-you-earn should be increased from its present level of £1,200 to £2,400 per annum. That suggestion should be followed up.

The report makes many other recommendations that would tighten up matters in Scotland in a way that would benefit those who are assisted by all the voluntary organisations in my country.

9.44 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): This has been a very intelligent and interesting debate, and it has shown how valuable is the voluntary sector in society today. It is an important building block in cementing together the different strands of a diverse culture and in giving a sense of self-worth to those who volunteer.

I acknowledge the massive contribution made by the voluntary sector to British society. The benefits are apparent not only to the beneficiaries but the volunteers themselves. Volunteering promotes self-esteem. It enables volunteers to express views and exert influence on policy makers, both locally and nationally. They have a greater sense of purpose and a greater sense of control over their own lives.

The voluntary sector is supported by the Labour party because volunteers become stakeholders in society—a point made very well by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth). That is why a new Labour Government will use the proceeds from a windfall tax on the privatised utilities to fund a scheme to get young people back into work or training or into the voluntary sector.

Labour believes that the voluntary sector is a valuable way of engaging many young people in the main stream of society, to give them self-esteem and to help them to help themselves. We also recognise the enormous contribution made by the voluntary sector in improving the quality of life for many people. Most charities are now changing their roles from the traditional paternalistic model, and are moving to a user-led approach that empowers volunteers as individuals rather than simply service charities' beneficiaries.

We are totally behind these changes. We welcome the Deakin report and the proposal of the concordat between central Government and representatives of the sector. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has endorsed this proposal, and I urge the Secretary of State for National Heritage to do the same.

Volunteering is a popular activity. There are 23 million people involved in volunteering. It is more popular as an activity than almost every other pastime apart from dancing.

The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth said that, if something needed to be done, we should ask a busy person. Well, even so, much volunteering is concentrated in those who are middle-aged, on high incomes and with good educational attainments. But that

[Mrs. Anne Campbell]

is not true of informal volunteering in community care, where it is more likely to be black and ethnic minority as well as lower income groups who are most involved. We should be aware of that, and acknowledge that very important contribution.

We need to look at more ways of involving older people and younger people in voluntary work. We know that those who are paid out-of-pocket expenses are much more likely to volunteer, and that there are also concerns about benefit entitlement for people who are unemployed. I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure the House that, when the jobseeker's allowance is introduced next October, jobseekers will not be deterred from volunteering, and nor will those on incapacity benefit or severe disablement allowance.

There has been a great change in the way in which the voluntary sector has interacted with local authorities over the past two or three years. Now, many charitable organisations are contractors for local authority statutory services. This has produced a huge increase in income for many volunteer bodies. In fact, one survey estimated that the statutory income of those dealing with elderly people had doubled while those with services aimed at children and families had increased by 20 per cent.

However, the problem—as ably pointed out by my hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), for Stratford-on-Avon and for Delyn (Mr. Hanson)—is that the money is tied to specific contracts and services. If it replaces other funding, it prevents charities from doing what they see as important. If voluntary organisations are to retain their independence, they must continue to receive grants that are not tied to specific areas of work. As my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn said, core funding is essential, because it will enable organisations to remain independent.

The Minister mentioned the effect of lottery ticket sales on charitable giving. Earlier, we discussed the family expenditure survey, and the fact that it may not be an accurate reflection of the amount that people give to charities. Its unreliability in estimating such small amounts of expenditure was illustrated by its assessment that lottery ticket sales were 42 per cent. lower than they actually were. It can hardly be relied on to estimate the amount that people put in collection tins and the envelopes left on doorsteps.

The Minister said that the picture was confused, and I agree. An enormous amount of work needs to be done to assess the effect on charities. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations, however, has calculated—through work with National Opinion Polls—that 6.4 per cent. of charitable donations were substituted for lottery tickets, and that mainly the smaller charities were affected. Those are the charities that rely on street collections, door-to-door collections, small raffles and lotteries, and those are the charities that have failed to benefit from the national lottery.

The chairman of the National Lotteries Charities Board, Mr. David Sieff, has said that any small organisation will be able to apply at any time, probably for amounts between £500 and £5,000; but, if we look at the grants given in the past year, we see that grants of less than £10,000 still make up less than 2 per cent. of the total spend. That means that the funds are going to large, well-organised charities that have the professionalism and expertise to make large successful bids. The Government should recognise that smaller organisations lose because of that. The Community Development Foundation has pointed to a general lack of information and assistance for such groups.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), the shadow Secretary of State for National Heritage, has produced a leaflet that helps small organisations applying for grants. The Government could follow his lead, by providing assistance for groups that need help. We should also consider the smaller community groups that may benefit from much smaller sums than the minimum limit of £500. Labour is exploring ways of getting cash down to a local level without creating expensive bureaucracies.

The hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) highlighted the complexity of funding for youth organisations. I hope that the Minister will make use of his valuable expertise, and will try to simplify the system so that those organisations do not lose.

I realise that time is short, and the Minister has been generous in that regard. Let me add, however, that people have a misperception about the amount of money that goes to charity when they buy their lottery tickets. When members of the public were asked how much of the pound they had spent on their ticket would go to charity, most replied, "17p"; in fact, it is less than 6p. That raises the question whether the proportion given to the various good causes should be reconsidered. It certainly does not tally with people's perception.

There is also the problem of corporate giving. There is room for improvement by companies themselves in regard to donations to charity. Corporate donations to charity in the United Kingdom still amount to only one tenth of donations in the United States. The hon. Member for Mid-Kent mentioned the excellent Barclays new futures scheme, which provides a good example for other commercial organisations.

I acknowledge the work done by my hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff, South and Penarth, and for Stockport (Ms Coffey). I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport was detained on other duties, and was not able to speak and give us the benefit of her valuable expertise from which we could all have learned. Both my hon. Friends worked hard in the consultation with voluntary organisations in helping to evolve Labour policy on the issue.

The voluntary sector is not a way to get cheap welfare. The role of volunteers, and especially carers, must be respected and supported. Everyone in a civilised society must agree with that. They must not be forced to carry their often willingly borne burdens alone. The remarks by the Secretary of State for Health which were reported in *The Guardian* on 10 July make it clear that he regards the voluntary sector as a way to reduce public expenditure. He said:

> "Carers and volunteers must look after elderly parents in order to limit their impact on public spending."

That is a disgraceful view of the voluntary sector.

We encourage carers and volunteers to look after elderly parents, but we realise that we must give them the support that they need. Everyone agrees that the voluntary sector is about more than that. We celebrate the unique contribution that it makes to our society, and wish it well for the future.

9.55 pm

Mr. Sproat: With the leave of the House, I should like to respond in the few minutes remaining to as many points as possible. The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) said that we were "celebrating" the voluntary sector. The word was well chosen, and I concur with his sentiment.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) said he welcomed the debate as a chance to say thank you to all volunteers at every level. He gave the remarkable example of a lady in his constituency who for 40 years had spent her volunteer time taking under-privileged children on holiday. That is at the heart of what all hon. Members admire about the voluntary sector.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth spoke about the work of the Churches. By happy chance, this very afternoon the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) brought a delegation from St. John's Methodist church in Connors Quay to see me, and it was interesting to hear about its work. It holds monthly lunches for people whose ages range from 60 to 96, and organises ballet and tap dances for young people and tea rotas in hospitals.

We all applaud the giant charities, but we should remember that most charities are small and consist of local people who do not have much money but who do all they can to help their fellow human beings. I am glad that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside brought that group to meet me.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth, no doubt unintentionally, cast rather a slur on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage. She is in Atlanta, Georgia, watching the Olympic games in her role as the Secretary of State in charge of sport. The debate was originally scheduled for last Tuesday, but, perfectly fairly, it was moved from then to today by the Opposition.

My right hon. Friend was not able to take part today but had certainly intended to make a powerful opening speech. No one in the Government is keener on voluntary work than my right hon. Friend, and we shall prove that by the way that we shall grip this vital subject in the Department of National Heritage.

The hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) generously said that, perhaps in the past, the Conservative Government had held the high ground in voluntary work. I do not know whether that is true, but I certainly do not wish to inject party politics into that area. If the other parties are now sharing that high ground, that is to be welcomed, because it must be for the good of those who are helped.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) has the territorial decoration, and has 13 years experience in the Territorial Army. From his long experience, he spoke about the difficulties of youth organisations in dealing with so many different bodies. He gave a recent example, which showed that no fewer than 10 different bodies had to be dealt with by one organisation.

My hon. Friend made an extremely important point. Had I but world enough and time, I would deal with it at greater length, but I take note of what he said. I take note also of his extremely important point about litigation. We will look at that in the context of our review of all charity and voluntary subjects.

I know that I have to sit down in about 15 seconds, so that we can deal with the next business. I shall close by emphasising the extent to which the Government remain committed to the voluntary sector.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House welcomes and applauds the massive contribution made by the Voluntary Sector to the lives of individuals and communities throughout Britain and believes that it is the responsibility of Government to nurture the sector while respecting the independence of charities and voluntary organisations.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the consideration of Lords Amendments to certain Commons Amendments, and of a Lords consequential Amendment to the Broadcasting Bill *[Lords]* and consideration of any Lords Amendments or proposals relating to bills which may be received, may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Broadcasting Bill *[Lords]*

Lords amendments to Commons amendments, and a Lords consequential amendment, considered.

After Clause 66

The Lords have agreed to the amendment made by the Commons: No. 101, insert the following new clause—

NOMINATION BY COMMISSION FOR PURPOSES OF SECTION 31(2) OF BROADCASTING ACT 1990

(".—(1) Section 32 of the 1990 Act (nomination of bodies to provide news for regional Channel 3 services) is amended in accordance with subsections (2) to (5).

(2) For subsections (1) to (6) there is substituted—

"(1) With a view to enabling them to nominate bodies corporate as eligible for appointment for the purposes of section 31(2), the Commission shall invite bodies appearing to them to be qualified for nomination to make applications to be so nominated.

(2) Where a body corporate—

(a) applies to the Commission (whether in pursuance of any such invitation or not) to be nominated under this section as a nominated news provider, and

(b) appears to the Commission to be qualified for nomination, the Commission shall so nominate that body.

(3) Subject to subsection (5), any nomination made by the Commission under this section shall remain in force for a period of ten years, and at the end of that period may be renewed by the Commission for a further period of ten years.

(4) Where the Commission are notified by the holders of licences to provide regional Channel 3 services that the appointment of the appointed news provider is due to expire, or to be renewed or terminated in accordance with the terms of the appointment, the Commission shall review the qualification for nomination of all nominated news providers (including the appointed news provider).

(5) If on any such review it appears to the Commission that a body is no longer qualified for nomination they shall (subject to subsection (6)) by notice terminate that body's nomination.

(6) The Commission shall not terminate a body's nomination under subsection (5) unless they have given the body a reasonable opportunity of making representations to them about the proposed termination."

(3) In subsection (9), paragraph (b) is omitted.

(4) In subsection (12), for the words from "appearing" onwards there is substituted "which—

(a) in their opinion is or, if appointed, would be effectively equipped and adequately financed to provide high quality news programmes for broadcasting in regional Channel 3 services; and

(b) appears to them not to be disqualified for being nominated under this section by virtue of this subsection."

(5) In subsection (13)—

(a) in paragraph (b), after "section", where second occurring, there is inserted "as eligible for appointment", and

(b) after paragraph (b) there is inserted—

"and

(c) references to the appointed news provider are references to the person for the time being appointed for the purposes of section 31(2) under the arrangements referred to in section 31A(a)."

(6) Subsections (2), (4) and (5) do not affect the application of section 32 of the 1990 Act before 1st January 1998 in relation to nomination for the purposes of section 31(2) as originally enacted.") *with the following amendment:*

No. 101A, in subsection (4), after "appearing", insert ", where second occurring,".

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 116

COMMENCEMENT AND TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS

The Lords have agreed to the amendment made by the Commons: No. 166, in page 87, line 39, after ("114(1)") insert—

("(f) the entries in Schedule 8 relating to sections 45(8) and (9) and 47(11) and (12) of the 1990 Act, and section 115(2) so far as relating to those entries, and

(g)") *with the following amendments:*

No. 166A, in line 1, at end insert—

("( ) paragraphs 10B and 13A of Schedule 7 so far as relating to BBC companies (as defined by section 202(1) of the 1990 Act), and section 115(1) so far as relating to those paragraphs in their application to such companies,")

No. 166B, in line 2, after ("sections") insert ("32(9),")

Amendments agreed to.

Schedule 2

AMENDMENTS OF BRODCASTING ACT 1990 RELATING TO RESTRICTIONS ON HOLDING OF LICENCES

The Lords have agreed to the amendment made by the Commons: No. 177, in page 91, line 32, at end insert—

("( ) For sub-paragraph (6) there is substituted—

"(6) In this Schedule any reference to a participant with more than a 20 per cent. interest in a body corporate is a reference to a person who—

(a) holds or is beneficially entitled to more than 20 per cent. of the shares in that body, or

(b) possesses more than 20 per cent. of the voting power in that body.

(7) Sub-paragraph (6) shall have effect subject to the necessary modifications in relation to other references in this Schedule—

(a) to an interest of more than a specified percentage in a body corporate, or

(b) to an interest of a specified percentage or more in a body corporate.

(8) Any reference in this Schedule to a person who is over a particular age is a reference to a person who has attained that age") *with the following amendment:*

No. 177A, in line 17, at end insert—

(".—(1) Paragraph 2 of Part I of Schedule 2 is amended as follows.

(2) At the beginning of sub-paragraph (1) there is inserted "Subject to sub-paragraph (1A)".

(3) After sub-paragraph (1) there is inserted—

"(1A) For the purposes of this Schedule, a person's holding of shares, or possession of voting power, in a body corporate shall be disregarded if, or to the extent that—

(a) he holds the shares concerned—

(i) as a nominee,

(ii) as a custodian (whether under a trust or by a contract), or

(iii) under an arrangement pursuant to which he has issued, or is to issue, depositary receipts, as defined by section 220(1) of the Companies Act 1985, in respect of the shares concerned, and

(b) he is not entitled to exercise or control the exercise of voting rights in respect of the shares concerned.

(1B) For the purposes of sub–paragraph (1A)(b)—

(a) a person is not entitled to exercise or control the exercise of voting rights in respect of shares if he is bound (whether by contract or otherwise) not to exercise the voting rights, or not to exercise them otherwise than in accordance with the instructions of another, and

(b), voting rights which a person is entitled to exercise or of which he is entitled to control the exercise only in certain circumstances shall be taken into account only when those circumstances have arisen and for long as they continue to obtain."")

Amendment agreed to.

The Lords have agreed to the amendment made by the Commons: No. 185, in page 94, leave out lines 4 to 50 and insert—

("General limit on the holding of licences to provide television services or interests in bodies corporate holding such licences

2.—(1) If any person's audience time, in respect of a period of twelve months ending with the last day of any calendar month, exceeds 15 per cent. of total audience time, he shall not, subject to sub–paragraph (4), at any time in the following month—

(a) hold two or more licences to provide relevant services falling within one or more of the categories specified in paragraph 1(2)(a), (b), (c), (d) or (g),

(b) be a participant with a qualifying interest in two or more bodies corporate each of which holds a licence, or two or more licences, to provide services falling within one or more of those categories,

(c) hold any licence to provide a relevant service falling within any of those categories and be a participant with a qualifying interest in any body corporate which holds such a licence or two or more such licences,

(d) provide a foreign satellite service and either hold any licence to provide a relevant service falling within any of those categories or be a participant with a qualifying interest in a body corporate which holds such a licence or two or more such licences, or

(e) hold a licence to provide relevant services falling within the category specified in paragraph 1(2)(g) and provide two or more such services.

(2) For the purposes of sub–paragraph (1), and subject to sub–paragraph (3), a person's audience time in respect of any period is the aggregate of—

(a) the audience time attributable in respect of that period to each relevant service falling within any of the categories specified in paragraph 1(2)(a), (b), (c), (d) or (g) provided under a licence held by him,

(b) one half of the audience time attributable in respect of that period to any relevant service falling within any of the categories specified in paragraph 1(2)(a), (b), (c), (d) or (g) provided under a licence held by a body corporate which he does not control, but in which he is a participant with a qualifying interest, and

(c) the audience time attributable in respect of that period to any foreign satellite service provided by him.

(3) For the purposes of calculating a person's audience time in respect of any period in accordance with sub–paragraph (2)—

(a) there shall be included the audience time attributable in respect of that period to each service referred to in that sub–paragraph in respect of which, on the date upon which the calculation of his audience time for the purposes of sub–paragraph (1) is made, he holds the licence, is a participant in the body corporate which holds the licence, or which he provides (as the case may be), irrespective of whether he held the licence, or was a participant in the body corporate which holds the licence or provided the service at any time during the period; and

(b) there shall (for the avoidance of doubt) be excluded the audience time attributable in respect of that period to each service referred to in sub–paragraph (2) in respect of which, prior to the date upon which the calculation of his audience time for the purposes of sub–paragraph (1) is made, he has ceased to hold the licence, or to be a participant in the holder of the licence, or to provide the service (as the case may be).

(4) Sub–paragraph (1) shall not prevent a person from continuing to hold any licence, or to be a participant in a body corporate which holds any licence, or from continuing to provide any service (as the case may be) if and to the extent that arrangements made by him after the end of the period in respect of which his audience time exceeds 15 per cent. of total audience time would cause his audience time, calculated so as to take into account the efffect of those arrangements, not to exceed 15 per cent. of total audience time.

(5) In this paragraph "foreign satellite service" means any service (other than a non–domestic satellite service) which consists in the transmission of television programmes by satellite, is provided on a frequency other than one allocated to the United Kingdom for broadcasting by satellite and either—

(a) appears to the Commission to be intended for general reception in the United Kingdom (whether or not it appears to them to be also intended for general reception elsewhere), or

(b) is (to any extent) relayed by a local delivery service.

(6) References in this paragraph—

(a) to the audience time attributable to any service in respect of any period, or

(b) to total audience time in respect of any period,

shall be construed in accordance with paragraph 3.

(7) In this paragraph "qualifying interest" means an interest of more than 20 per cent.

(8) The Secretary of State may by order amend sub–paragraph (7)—

(a) by substituting a different percentage for any percentage for the time being specified there, and

(b) so as to specify different percentages in relation to licences to provide different services.

(9) The Secretary of State may by order amend sub–paragraphs (1)(a), (2)(a) and (b) by adding a reference to relevant services falling within the category specified in paragraph 1(2)(aa)") *with the following amendments:*

No. 185A, leave out lines 4 to 7 and insert

("No one person may, at any time when his audience time in respect of the period of twelve months ending with the last day of the preceding calendar month exceeds 15 per cent of total audience time in respect of that period—")

No. 185B, in line 27, leave out

(", and subject to sub–paragraph (3)")

No. 185C, in line 28, after ("time") insert ("at any time ("the relevant time")")

No. 185D, in line 33, at end insert ("at the relevant time")

No. 185E, in line 38, after ("is") insert ("at the relevant time")

No. 185F, in line 41, at end insert ("at the relevant time")

No. 185G, in line 42, leave out sub–paragraphs (3) and (4)

Amendments agreed to.

Schedule 7

OTHER AMENDMENTS OF BROADCASTING ACT 1990

The Lords have agreed to the amendment made by the Commons: No. 282, in page 128, line 9, at end insert—

(". In section 202(1) of the 1990 Act (interpretation)—

(a) after the definition of "broadcast" there is inserted—

""a Channel 4 company" means—

(a) any body corporate which is controlled by the Channel Four Television Corporation, or

(b) any body corporate in which the Corporation or any body corporate falling within paragraph (a) above is (to any extent) a participant (as defined in paragraph 1(1) of Part I of Schedule 2);"

(b) in the definition of "connected", for "licence" there is substituted "person", and

(c) after the definition of "programme" there is inserted—

""an S4C company" means—

(a) any body corporate which is controlled by the Welsh Authority, or

(b) any body corporate in which the Welsh Authority or any body corporate falling within paragraph (a) above is (to any extent) a participant (as defined in paragraph 1(1) of Part I of Schedule 2);"") *with the following consequential amendment to the Bill:*

No. 282A, in page 45, line 5, leave out

("in relation to his additional services licence")

Consequential amendment agreed to.

PETITION

Rail Link (Ealing)

10.3 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I beg leave to present a petition from the people of the constituency of Ealing, North, which states:

"the constituency of Ealing, North declares its strong support for Harry Greenway, Member of Parliament for Ealing, North, in his opposition to plans to establish a rail link from the Midlands to the Channel Tunnel which would cut through the borough of Ealing.

The rail link would run through seven areas of Metropolitan Open land and Green Belt, including the Perivale Wood and Islip Manor and would vastly increase railway traffic to five heavy freight trains per hour with the noise and pollution that this would bring."

The proposal has incurred enormous opposition from my constituency and myself, because, although we all want to see freight move from road to rail, we do not wish to see pollution of such open areas of land as remain within the borough of Ealing, particularly those in Perivale and Northolt. We could not support a railway operation of this magnitude running within inches of people's homes, to the detriment of their lives.

My constituents have proposed this petition with my strong support. The petition is signed by hundreds of thousands of people.

The petitioners request that the Secretary of State for Transport and Members of the House of Commons reject these proposals of Central Railways.

The Petitioners remain ever more.

To lie upon the Table.

Brazilian Mahogany

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

10.4 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): I am pleased to have the opportunity to introduce tonight's Adjournment debate. In the pre-Jopling days, it was always a pleasure to raise such debates towards the end of the Session. To some degree that opportunity has been lost, although we have some additional debates on Wednesday mornings.

First, I am not a spokesman for Friends of the Earth. I do not belong to that organisation and I do not agree with it in every respect, however I entirely agree with its stance on the importation of mahogany into Britain, which is based on a shameful trade that does no credit to the Brazilian Government or the British Government.

As hon. Members will be aware, most mahogany comes from Brazil. We are the second largest importer of Brazilian mahogany. Only the United States imports more. I consider what is taking place in Brazil to be deeply shocking and quite disgraceful. I hope that the Government will use their best endeavours within the European Union and in conjunction with the United States to redress the wrongs that have been perpetrated on the people of Brazil, especially the Indian population.

We have heard much about voluntary arrangements. My view is that voluntary arrangements involving Governments and private enterprise are totally unsatisfactory. The only arrangements that have a semblance of working properly are those with the backing of statutory powers. The carnage that takes place in Brazil in order to obtain mahogany is one of the worst examples of voluntary arrangements that anyone could imagine.

Accessible areas are already heavily depleted and, as the wood becomes harder to reach, vast tracts of the countryside are being despoiled to make roadways into more remote areas. Timber is even being procured from reserves that were originally set aside for the indigenous people and the wildlife. Unfortunately, it appears that the British Government are prepared to put all the blame on the Brazilian Government. Although that is true in a superficial sense, it does not alter the fact that we should do much more to redeem that deplorable state of affairs.

There have been clashes between the indigenous population and the logging fraternity, often resulting in fatalities. That is completely unacceptable. If the price of mahogany coming to Britain is the death of people in Brazil, I do not want Britain to import mahogany. I expect that most people would agree with that, but the Government do not see it that way.

Friends of the Earth has joined forces with more than 100 environmental and human rights groups in Brazil. I would have thought that would have had some impact. However, the 100 groups that are working together in Brazil receive no help whatsoever from the British Government.

It is appalling that although fairly recently it almost became possible, with the help of the British Government, to place mahogany in a different category, in which it would have received full protection, the attempt failed because the measure could not achieve a two-thirds majority of the countries involved.

Both the Brazilian and the British Governments, like all those involved in the timber industry, have known for many years that beyond doubt illegal mahogany trading takes place. However, as always under the Conservative Government, the interests of industry are paramount and humanitarian factors take second place. The Government have steadfastly resisted calls for regulation. I shall not repeat what I have said about self-regulation, because everyone with any sense knows that that is a dead duck.

In 1993, following pressure from environmentalists, some logging companies in the Brazilian state of Pará and the United Kingdom National Hardwood Association signed an agreement known as the AIMEX agreement. That was all very laudable. The only problem is that it does not work. Only legally obtained mahogany is supposed to be traded, but nothing has changed. The illegal trade is as bad as ever.

Many timber companies hide behind that agreement, citing their support for the AIMEX accord to allay public concern about the illegal mahogany trade. The accord hides the fact that the wood continues to be stolen from Indian lands, often with terrible consequences.

Information has been obtained from the Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Natural Resources—IBAMA—from the Brazilian National Indian Foundation—FUNAI—and from the district attorney's office, and the proof is there beyond doubt. No one denies it, but still there is no action.

It seems that the IBAMA, the regulatory body involved—if we can call it regulatory; monitoring body sounds more appropriate—has withheld information on the illegal activities. Logging in indigenous reserves contravenes the Brazilian constitution, which makes commercial activities in those reserves illegal. Still this country imports timber, knowing full well that it has been illegally gained.

The violence against the Indians is perhaps the most appalling feature. There have been five murders and numerous cases of aggression, with people being battered and damage to Indian property. Still it goes on. I have not heard a whimper from the Government about it.

What makes things worse is the fact that the Brazilian Government are content to go along with the situation. Prosecutions for illegal timber trading have been few and far between. Friends of the Earth has obtained an appalling detailed document about the carnage that takes place.

The Brazilian Ministry of Justice has been involved, and has been informed that there were 300 invaders in the Sararé indigenous area, including 30 logging companies that were taking timber illegally. That seems almost like a form of land piracy—the sort of thing that occurred in years gone by when people were attacked on the high seas and their goods seized and illicitly disposed of. What is going on has all the hallmarks of that type of activity. The position is now desperate.

The FUNAI president sent a memo asking for 15 agents of the Brazilian Government to be sent to the Kayapó area to help the Indians evict the loggers. But it seems that the Brazilian Government have neither the political will nor the resources to put their own house in order.

[Mr. Bill Etherington]

That does not excuse the United Kingdom Government, who willingly comply with the situation and continue to allow the imports. In a country that prides itself on being civilised and talks about being environmentally responsible, the British citizenry have every right to expect a more forthright attitude.

Why cannot the British Government consult the United States and see if they can do something? At one time, the United States objected to the trade, but unfortunately—a bit like in Britain—once a few multinationals put pressure on the Government, the will to do something seems to evaporate. I would like to think that my country is prepared to stand up and do something about it, but that seems to be wishful thinking on my behalf at the moment.

I could go on at great length about the deaths and murders and the fact that ill-protected Indians living in fairly primitive conditions are being treated in a disgraceful manner by the loggers—that is the term that is used for those people.The situation is deplorable.

As recently as tonight, I received a letter from another group—Earth Care—asking me what I am prepared to do about a similar situation in central Africa. What am I supposed to do? I am just a humble Back Bencher. I look to the Government—not one I have a lot of faith in—to do something about the problem, but action does not seem to be forthcoming. It is about time that a little more emphasis was placed on the Government combining with the European Union, which is the most powerful trading organisation on earth, to bring some pressure to bear on the Brazilian Government and coerce them into fulfilling their responsibilities.

If Conservative central office is to be believed, which is always questionable, I understand that it will not be too long before Brazil overtakes this country in terms of prosperity. If that is the case, we need to act quickly. Once it has overtaken us, we will be listened to even less.

Obviously, the management plans of the Brazilian Government are not working. They need a little moral support and pressure. Among this pile of information here, I have a deplorable letter from the Overseas Development Agency, which virtually states that there is nothing to be done. I do not underestimate the fact that, in specific terms and speaking constitutionally, the Government have raised some fairly half-hearted objections. I have here a copy of a reply from the ODA to Friends of the Earth, dated 17 July, which makes grim and depressing reading. As always, the Government share the concerns about the environment, but once again, the letter states that they

"continue to believe that primary responsibility for ensuring that mahogany extraction is carried out lawfully rests of course with the Government of Brazil."

That seems to mean that nothing much will be done.

The only encouraging thing in the letter is that there appears to have been a change of Ministers in Brazil and the new man is prepared "to revamp" the situation and

"crack down on illegal trading in natural resources, including mahogany."

I hope that the United Kingdom Government will give him some encouragement in his quest.

The letter to Friends of the Earth is from John Moncrieff of the environment policy department of the ODA. He states that it would be useless to go to the European Community. It would be because it has been wound up for quite a long time—it is now the European Union and I am surprised that official Government documentation still talks about the European Community.

There is one little bit of brightness on the horizon. The letter also states:

"The Government does however share your concern about this species and will continue to monitor trade and take action if necessary."

Although the whole affair is a catalogue of depression and disaster, I do not want to be too carping and take away from the United Kingdom Government the fact they have gone through some fairly half-hearted motions and have agreed in writing that something should be done. The Government say that they agree that something should be done. I want the Minister to give me some reassurance that this country will try some action.

The Government told us that sanctions would not work in South Africa but they worked very well. The same people who were lauding Nelson Mandela when he was here recently were saying not so long ago that nothing could be done about South Africa by Britain because it was an internal matter and sanctions would not work. I hope that we will get something more positive and forthright on this issue.

10.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): It is important that timber extraction should be carried out lawfully, with conservation safeguards and full regard to the interests of the people living in the forest. Before I come to the Government's policies on that, I shall deal briefly with the remarks made by the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) about the agreements entered into by the National Hardwood Association.

To supplement Brazilian Government controls over timber extraction and export, the NHA signed an agreement with the exporters' association of the region from which most of the UK's imports of Brazilian mahogany originate. Checks and documentation aim to provide NHA members with assurances that the timber that they buy has been logged in accordance with Brazilian laws. The NHA has a formal procedure to deal with complaints about alleged illegal activities. I understand that it is examining several such allegations. In addition, I understand that an NHA delegation is in Brazil for talks with its Government and exporters about the mahogany trade. It is visiting logging areas and will report on its findings.

The UK timber trade is right to take allegations of illegal activity seriously, but the primary responsibility for enforcing Brazilian national legislation must lie with the Brazilian Government. Unilateral action by the United Kingdom outside the framework of international agreements would be damaging to the co-operation on which those agreements depend and to the advancement of global measures to promote environmental action.

There is already an agreed framework for regulating international trade in wild plants and animals: CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, which has been ratified by more than 130 countries, including the United Kingdom and Brazil. Under CITES, commercial trade in more than 800 species is banned and a further 25,000 commercially traded species are subject to checks and licensing procedures. As the hon. Gentleman said, application of the controls requires the consent of two thirds of the CITES parties.

At the last conference in 1994, a proposal to regulate, but not ban, trade in Brazilian mahogany was defeated. The United Kingdom supported the proposal on the basis of the scientific evidence but the conference took a different view. There was extensive discussion and various options were examined by a working group that met over two days. Finally, the conference decided that CITES should not intervene in the mahogany trade.

It would be wrong to accept only those conference decisions that we fully support and ignore the rest. Stricter import measures by EU member states normally apply only to species that a CITES conference has already agreed to add to the convention. That is not so in this case. International agreements will not work without the support of the countries that sign up to them. A European Community ban on imports of Brazilian mahogany after a conference decision to reject less severe measures would dangerously strain a convention that recognises that major decisions should reflect the will of the parties. That would be a setback for conservation, not an advance.

As far as possible, we must work within CITES. The last conference endorsed a United Kingdom initiative to establish a international working group to examine CITES-related timber issues. The group made good progress at its last meeting in London at the end of last year and will meet again in September before reporting to the next CITES conference 11 months from now. That conference may also have before it fresh proposals to add Brazilian mahogany to CITES. If so, we will decide our position after reviewing the evidence, including any factors that may have changed. In the meantime, a more limited CITES monitoring scheme for Brazilian mahogany came into effect November last year. We hope that that will yield useful additional data in due course.

More direct Government involvement with forest management in Brazil is being pursued following the signing of a memorandum of understanding on environmental co-operation with the Brazilian Government. Under this accord, the Overseas Development Administration has funded £19 million-worth of projects, mainly on forestry. The aim is to promote sustainable forest management and strengthen environmental institutions.

We also aim to advance wider international discussion on improving forest management. At the earth summit in Rio in 1992, the United Kingdom played a leading role in ensuring the agreement of a statement of principles on the sustainable management of the world's forests. That was the first international consensus on the need to conserve the world's forests.

European countries followed up Rio with a commitment to the Helsinki guidelines for sustainable forest management. Thirty eight European countries are now committed to implementation of those guidelines. In 1994, we published "Sustainable Forestry: The UK Programme", which details United Kingdom action to pursue sustainable forest management at home, and promote the conservation and sustainable development of all the world's forests.

The United Kingdom has also played a major role in establishing the United Nations intergovernmental panel on forests, which will report to the Commission on Sustainable Development in 1997 with specific proposals to follow up the principles agreed at Rio. We hope that the panel will produce agreement on criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management on the basis of national plans, and devise a mechanism for periodic international review of the forestry sector.

Improving the management of the world's forests requires international co-operation rather than confrontation. Of course we must do our best to ensure that the timber that we import, from whichever country, has been harvested legally. I believe that the United Kingdom timber trade is acting responsibly through its discussions with the Brazilian authorities, through the formal agreement it has signed with exporting companies, and by its willingness to investigate complaints about alleged wrongdoings.

One has to ask whether driving exports of mahogany away from the United Kingdom to other places where importers might take their responsibilities less seriously would best serve the interests of conservation. I doubt that it would, and I do not favour a unilateral ban on imports of Brazilian mahogany into the United Kingdom or the European Community as a whole.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I had the good fortune to go to Altamira on the Xingu river in 1989, where the Kayapó put forward a number of proposals for the safeguarding of their forest. I listened carefully to what the Minister said and I should like to put three points to him.

First, what recommendations made at the intergovernmental conference are being pursued for 1997?

Secondly, on the issue of the Kayapó, which my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) raised, it has been reported in the press that Pai-Kan and others have brought various complaints about the infringement of their lands to the notice of the Brazilian Government. Has that been discussed with the Brazilian Government? I took Pai-Kan to see Mr. Speaker Weatherill on a previous occasion. He was my guest in the House, as he had been Ghillean Prance's guest at Kew.

The third point is about long-term financial help to the Brazilian Government. Many Brazilians argue that, if the Amazonian rain forest is really the lung of the world, the world has certain responsibilities in helping us keep it. I wonder whether the Minister, in the short time that he has, will comment on what I hope were those constructive points.

Mr. Clappison: I will deal with the three points in the order in which the hon. Gentleman raised them. On the point about our international commitments and the report back to the relevant international conventions, I think that I made it clear that we are approaching this by upholding the principle of sustainable management of forests and encouraging each country to draw up national plans for sustainable management. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman, with his interest in the subject, well knows, we played a leading part in the Rio convention and in the important commitments that were made on forestry there.

[Mr. Clappison]

The hon. Gentleman's second point about the gentleman and the specific area related to detailed matters, which I shall look into in the light of his comments.

The hon. Gentleman's third point was interesting. As I said in my speech, the Overseas Development Administration has entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Brazilian Government for £19 million worth of sustainable projects in Brazil. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that that is a fairly substantial amount to commit to an important project.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 24 July 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

9.34 am

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. During the course of preparations for today's Adjournment debate, in which hon. Members can raise various matters, I and my hon. Friends the Members for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) and for Newham, North–East (Mr. Timms) have been most concerned about the deficit of East London and the City health authority. In attempting to compare that deficit—of over £30 million—with those of other district health authorities, I tabled a question to the Secretary of State for Health.

That question has been answered and printed in *Hansard* this morning. I shall not read out the question, but it was about deficits, which is a very important matter for the health service across the country. The answer states:

"The information requested is based on estimates subject to revision. It is not suitable for publication."—[*Official Report*, 22 July 1996; Vol. 282, c. *121*.]

Every hon. Member is familiar with answers containing such expressions as "not centrally held", "disproportionate costs" and "placed in the Library", but the answer "estimates subject to revision"—which is given all the time in response to questions on finance, taxation and public expenditure—is not a reason for withholding information.

Furthermore, the phrase

"It is not suitable for publication"

is an addition to the canon of unhappy excuses that sometimes comes from the Executive.

Madam Speaker, what are the appropriate means by which I can draw that matter to the attention of others? If the practice is more widespread, perhaps my raising this point of order will encourage other hon. Members who have received similar answers to take similar action.

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Member for giving me notice of his point of order, and I have seen the question and answer to which he refers. As he knows, however, the Speaker is not responsible for the content of ministerial answers. There are many ways in which hon. Members may pursue what they consider to be unsatisfactory answers, such as, for example, in Adjournment debates or by raising the issue with the relevant Select Committee. It is my understanding that the Select Committee on Public Service is currently inquiring into ministerial accountability. The hon. Member might help that Committee with its inquiries if he were to put the matter to it.

Adjournment (Summer)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House, at its rising today, do adjourn till Monday 14 October.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

9.37 am

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): There are three urgent and important issues I want briefly to address. Each of them merits a ministerial response before the House rises for the summer recess.

First, I want to raise Lord Rix's moving plea, in a letter to the Leader of the House, for a fair wind for his Disabled Persons and Carers (Short-term Breaks) Bill. His Bill won unanimous support in the Lords and I was delighted to be asked to sponsor it in this House. In doing so I have the support of right hon. and hon. Members of all parties, large and small, none of whom saw any justification whatever for the blocking of the Bill by a Government Whip when I presented it for Second Reading on 12 July. That our procedures can allow that to happen where a Bill has already been unanimously approved in another place is surely wrong and should be immediately reviewed.

While I cannot now discuss its terms, the Bill, as its title implies, is one to help disabled people and their carers who, hugely to their detriment, never go beyond their own homes. As Lord Rix pointed out in his letter to the Leader of the House, of the 130,000 adults and children with severe learning disabilities living with their families, four out of five never receive short-term care provision to relieve the pressure of full-time care in the family home.

All I will say today, as Lord Rix did in other words in seeking the right hon. Gentleman's help, is that this is bad for the disabled person, bad for carers and bad for the taxpayer.

As is accepted in other legislation on disability—not least that which I had the good fortune to bring to this House, both as a private Member and as a Minister—any failure to give the disabled person and the carer a break hastens the day when it will no longer be possible to cope at home, making long-term institutional care the only option at far greater cost to the taxpayer than that of facilitating short-term breaks. Carers may be among the most admired people in this country, but they are also among the most neglected. Helping them is not only a moral and social priority: it also makes economic sense.

While it appears on today's Order Paper only as a remaining order, the Government have it within their power to let Lord Rix's excellent Bill through this House before we adjourn for the recess. It is about a small step forward that, in Lord Rix's words, would

"add a touch of compassion and understanding to the Government's record."

He might justifiably have added that, for the Government to refuse to let so uncontroversial a measure through this House, would be both self-defeating and inhumane.

The issue is not one that divides one side of the House from the other. The divide is now one between the Government and both sides of the House, and I implore the right hon. Gentleman to do all he can to help the Bill forward. Meanwhile I must inform him that, if he is not able to assist its supporters today, I shall be seeking to discharge my commitment to the Bill in full by bringing

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

it back to the Order Paper of this House on every remaining sitting day of the current parliamentary Session.

I turn now, again briefly, to the very deep sense of injustice that persists among people with haemophilia and their families. The tragic fate of three brothers explains why they are so aggrieved. All three had haemophilia. Two were infected with HIV by contaminated NHS blood transfusions and died of AIDS-related illnesses. The third brother was infected with hepatitis C by NHS blood products and died of liver failure. The two brothers infected with HIV received help from the Macfarlane Trust, funded by the Government, and were able to make some provision for their families. But their brother, infected with hepatitis C, went to his grave having been refused that help. He was unable to make any provision for his family.

All three brothers had become terminally ill and died from the same cause: contaminated NHS blood products. But one was denied help given to the other two brothers by a Government who provided £70 million for people infected with HIV and set up the Macfarlane Trust to give them continuing support. The Government accepted their moral responsibility in the case of HIV infection. They have the same responsibility now in the HCV cases.

It is argued that compensating those infected with HCV would take money away from patient care in the NHS. To say that is to get not just the wrong end of the stick, but the wrong stick. For the payments made in the HIV cases, including those to the dependants of people who subsequently died because of AIDS-related illnesses, came from contingency moneys, which is what the Haemophilia Society is asking for now for the hepatitis C victims. The society simply wants the terms of reference of the Macfarlane Trust to be extended to include them.

Measured against the pain and suffering endured, the claim is an extremely modest one. Hepatitis C attacks the liver and is life-threatening. Current medical opinion is that up to 80 per cent. of those infected will develop chronic liver disease. Of these, some 20 per cent. will develop severe liver problems such as cirrhosis or liver cancer. More than 50 of those infected by contaminated blood products have already died and the death rate is accelerating.

This further tragedy in the haemophilia community dates back to before 1986 when heat treatment was introduced to end the contamination of NHS blood products. But by then 3,100 people with haemophilia alone had been infected with hepatitis C. In recognition of the scale of the problem, an all-party early-day motion was tabled, in my name, urging parity of treatment for people infected with HIV or HCV. The motion has now been signed by more than 260 right hon. and hon. Members, a majority of all Members of Parliament who are free to sign such motions. As the list of signatories shows, the issue is treated not as one of right and left but of right and wrong.

In none of the many campaigns in which I have been closely involved in this House in my 32 years here have I had so strong a sense that it should not be necessary to campaign to right such an obvious wrong. The Government know we are right and that our campaign is entirely free from party animus. They know, too, that if given the nod by Ministers, this House would settle the issue within an hour. That hour could and should be found before the new parliamentary Session begins. If there is no commitment today to finding it and the campaign has to go on, then go on it will until justice is achieved for people who simply want equitable treatment.

I turn now, thirdly and finally, to an issue of urgent concern to all long-term sick and disabled people and those who work with and for them. I refer to the implications of a judgment given by the Court of Appeal in what the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation—RADAR—describes as

"one of the most important cases to date on the rights of disabled people to community care services."

The court ruled that, when a local authority has agreed that a disabled person has needs for care services under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, the authority must meet those needs and cannot take its own budgetary constraints into consideration. This landmark ruling was given in a judicial review judgment against Gloucestershire county council in relation to its treatment of a disabled pensioner, Michael Barry, in withdrawing home care services from him, among 1,500 other disabled people in the county, claiming that a Government squeeze on funds was responsible for the cuts.

The Court of Appeal's judgment, as John Keep of RADAR who played such an admirable role in helping Michael Barry to achieve the judicial review has reminded me, is totally in line with the guidance given to me as the Minister for Disabled People about the legal effect of section 2 of theAct.

I set out that guidance in this House, for the information of right hon. and hon. Members and local authorities, making it crystal clear that to reduce or withdraw a service under the section without diminution in need, was plainly unlawful. That is what the Court of Appeal has now ruled and it is, in my view as the author of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act, urgently necessary for Ministers to issue guidance to local authorities about the implications for them of the court's ruling.

Clearly, service users whose needs have been assessed under the Act now have an undoubted right to have those needs provided for, and many thousands of disabled people up and down the country who had their services withdrawn or reduced for financial reasons are now entitled to have them restored. And they must quickly be identified and informed of their rights and entitlements. That there should ever have been any misunderstanding about the mandatory effect of the Act after my statement to the House is all the more disturbing when one learns that the legal guidance given to me as Minister was repeated by their legal advisers to all my successors in the post over the past 17 years.

The essential need now, however, is to ensure that no local authority is left in any doubt about its responsibilities as decided by the Court of Appeal. The right hon. Gentleman, whose genuine commitment to disabled people has so often been expressed, in opposition and government alike, fully appreciates the urgency of the call I am making to his ministerial colleagues on this issue and he needs no reminding of its importance to chronically sick and disabled people all over Britain.

9.48 am

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): I am conscious that many hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall be extremely brief. There is an element of continuity in the events to which I shall refer. I spoke in the Adjournment debate before the Easter recess in 1995 on the subject of Bart's, and I wish to return briefly to that subject. I shall dwell only on that single issue.

Some 30,000 people in south Hackney and south Islington, as well as my constituents in the City of London, have been adversely affected by the proposed move of Bart's to the Whitechapel site. Although the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) referred to East London and the City health authority, it is ironic that in 1993-94 Camden and Islington used more general medical beds at Bart's. That also has some relevance to present circumstances.

I shall ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House a single question at the end of my speech, so he does not need to take elaborate notes of the events that I wish to place on record. The easiest way of describing events since late 1995 and early 1996 is to quote the first two paragraphs of a letter from the two relevant community health councils—Islington and City and Hackney—to the Secretary of State on 22 April this year:

"Just over a year ago the accident and emergency department at St. Bartholomew's Hospital closed. Assurances were given in writing by East London and City Health Authority, which agreed to the closure, that general practitioners would have direct access to the local hospital for their medical patients. In reality this has proved extremely difficult with obstacles being put in their way whenever they have attempted to get people admitted. This has led to people from south Islington, south Hackney and the City being sent down to the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel where they have had to wait sometimes for many hours before being admitted and in some cases transferred back to Bart's for admission.

In the autumn City & Hackney CHC learned from unofficial sources that there were plans to close the general medical beds at Bart's at the beginning of February 1996 so terminating entirely the services available to local people. This was confirmed just before Christmas. The enclosed letter,"—

which I shall not quote—

"objecting in the strongest terms to the proposed bed closures, was sent to the General Manager of East London and City Health Authority. These closures had not been consulted on and were contrary to the agreement that the Health Authority had made with the Royal Hospitals Trust following its decision in March 1995 to go ahead with the plans set out in its consultation document, Health Services for the Future. The Royal Hospitals Trust maintained it was quite safe to close the beds because there had been so few admissions over the past 12 months. The reasons why are explained above."

There was then a two-month gap before the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), replied on 18 June 1996, with what was an essentially procedural answer on the subject of consultation. He did not dwell on the substance of the letter. I fear that the absence of any reference to its substance did nothing for morale either at Bart's or in the area to which I referred, and that is a subject on which I have commented before.

No doubt, cost has played a role. There are rumours that the special trustees at Bart's are being pressed for any money that can be used to help the Royal Hospitals trust. There is a degree of irony in that, as the conventional wisdom was that the backstop of the special trustees had previously allowed Bart's to get into lax financial ways. That was clearly a belief in the Department of Health, as my right hon. Friend, now Secretary of State for National Heritage, made clear in comment after comment to me in 1992-93 before Bart's took itself in hand so rigorously and effectively.

It is, however, cost pressure that I want primarily to raise as a matter that should detain the House from adjourning until it is settled. The matter is urgent because there are rumours that the Government would like to sign the private finance initiative contracts relating to the hospital in Whitechapel in October, which may well be before the House returns.

My question to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, of which I have given him brief notice, is whether there have been any modifications—either upwards or downwards—in the cost stated in the outline business plan submitted by the Royal Hospitals trust in 1994 and approved by the Secretary of State for Health in 1995 in the invitation to bid for the private finance initiative and, if so, what are the percentage changes. My right hon. Friend will recognise the significance of that query from his past service in the Department of Health.

A final irony is that, early in July, I asked the parliamentary doctor for an appointment before the House rose. The only appointment available was at noon today. We NHS patients take opportunities and imperatives when they are offered to us. If it should prevent me from being present in the Chamber when my right hon. Friend replies to the debate, I apologise. I also hope to be present when my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) raises the subject of D'Oyly Carte, a cause with which I am also associated.

9.54 am

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Just before the parliamentary recess, or what my brother-in-law persists in calling the parliamentary recession, we have the opportunity either to deal with the particulars—and we have heard important particulars from the previous two hon. Members who have spoken—or to speak in more general terms. I shall turn to the latter and reflect on what one may call the state of the nation as the Government stagger with great relief to the recess, having lost a number of Ministers on the way.

The Government's major concern is to survive. We have endured the politics of survival for some considerable time and that is not in the interests of the country. Therefore, it is to the state of the nation that I shall address one or two remarks and on which I shall make some reflections.

I was spurred to raise the subject by yesterday's exchange between the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition during Prime Minister's Question Time. My right hon. Friend asked the Prime Minister:

"Does he agree with his Chancellor's recent statement that he can see circumstances in which he would recommend that Britain joins a single currency during the next Parliament?"

The Prime Minister replied:

"We have made the position on a single currency entirely clear."

So my right hon. Friend continued:

"Can he, like his Chancellor, see circumstances in which he would recommend that Britain join a single currency during the next Parliament—yes or no?"

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

The Prime Minister replied:

"Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can tell the House whether he agrees with the argumentation in the pamphlet that I have here".—[*Official Report*, 23 July 1996; Vol. 282, c. 142.]

That exchange was extremely significant. The Prime Minister's response was astonishingly evasive, and one is bound to ask why. Why could not the Prime Minister give a straight answer to a straight question? If it were the case that in not even the most theoretical circumstances could the Prime Minister see a case for entering the single currency, he is surely deceiving our partners because, by remaining in discussions, he is implying that—if the circumstances were right, if the various convergence criteria were met, and if it were deemed to be in our national interests—he would be prepared to recommend to the House that we should join a single currency. However, he could not even say that he would do so in those theoretical circumstances. Why was that? He was in the awful position of having to look over his shoulder and say to left and right, "Have I done well? Have I answered correctly?" He was in the difficulty of not daring to identify his policy on that issue.

The Government's broad position is absolutely correct, however. The decision need not be taken for some years hence, when the circumstances may have changed and Britain can take a decision rationally on the basis of the configuration of countries and circumstances at the time. Why does not the Prime Minister at least say, "Yes. If the circumstances were correct, I would be prepared so to recommend"? The fact that he is not prepared to do so not only amounts to a deception of our partner countries, which let him and our Government into discussions on the basis that, if the circumstances were right, we would join, but is highly indicative of the state of the nation and of British politics.

The man in the street surely thinks of the Prime Minister as fundamentally decent, but with a wholly impossible balancing act to perform. He is seen as someone who is trying to hold together a party that is fundamentally divided. I have tried to find a character in Greek mythology who was in the same position. I recall one who was suspended between heaven and earth because neither would receive him. I thought of Sisyphus or some other character. I am sure that the Greeks would have conceived of some person on the rack or in circumstances alike to the Prime Minister's at the moment. He is certainly tortured as rivals position themselves for the post-election struggle for the leadership.

All serious commentators surely agree that this Parliament is already dead and that, effectively, we have already embarked on an election campaign. There will be some disagreement on when the Parliament died. Was it when Britain was forced out of the exchange rate mechanism, just after the then Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), so eloquently told us about its advantages? With a certain political amnesia, he is now bidding us to forget the eloquence of the speeches that he made shortly before the forced withdrawal. Certainly, for several months, the Government have been paralysed and Parliament has been dead. It cannot be right for the country that there is such politicking and paralysis in policy.

I travel fairly extensively and discuss matters with parliamentary colleagues on the continent. It is already clear that, in respect of the intergovernmental conference, a number of our partner countries are seriously considering putting relations with the United Kingdom on hold so far as is possible because they perceive the Government as a lame duck. Our partners are looking forward to a time after the election, whatever the result may be, when they can deal with a Government who are prepared to govern. I know of that position from very highly placed sources. That is sad and cannot be good for this country.

On politicking, we know that we shall return after the spillover session to an abnormal Queen's Speech. It will effectively be the Government's manifesto. It will be a shop-window Queen's Speech because, realistically, the Government will not be in a position to put into effect many of its proposals. In November and December, we shall be dealing with some Second Readings and the Budget, and in January and February, the Government will find it very difficult to get many of the ideas through. The Queen's Speech will be a parading of theory and not really relevant to the country's problems. It will be more relevant to the Government's wishes to be re-elected and their desire to encourage the country to view the form of their policies.

As the election campaign becomes shriller and more intense over the recess, it cannot have the traditional themes that the Government prefer, such as law and order and the wicked Labour party that is in thrall to the trade unions. Given our policy, that can hardly be a credible position to put before the country. One fears, therefore, that the theme chosen will be the flag and the idea of wrapping oneself in it over foreign policy. One fears a rather nasty campaign against foreigners, especially our European partners, along the lines of those in the popular newspapers that follow the Government. At home, alas, the flag will relate to the devolution policies of the Labour party and all other parties, with a slogan about the break-up of the United Kingdom.

We are, of course, in a world of slogans. "New Labour, new danger" is parroted in Prime Minister's questions like a music hall act. That is not serious politics. Serious questions need to be addressed in relation, for example, to the future shape of the United Kingdom. The Conservative party, under Disraeli for example, stole the clothes of Mr. Gladstone when it saw the way in which the Liberal party was addressing issues surrounding the urban working classes. Disraeli said that we must educate our masters and sought to address real problems. This Government are paralysed; they will not debate or try to address issues such as the Scottish and Welsh questions, which concern identity. It should be recognised that there are already clusters of government in Edinburgh and Cardiff that are not accountable. There can be a serious debate on how to address that. One cannot simply run away, chant slogans and pretend that such problems will go away.

Alas, over the next nine months, this country is likely to be afflicted by the politics of Micawberism. The Government are hoping that something will turn up. There is a smell of decay and a feeling of the end of an empire. We have heard about the Premier club and Mr. Beckwith, a gentleman who is bidding for Ministry of Defence houses and, as we are now told, is interested in buying Benefits Agency buildings around the country. Mr. Beckwith and others with the right amount of money are gaining access to the Prime Minister's ear. This smell of decay, paralysis, Micawberism, drift, this lame-duck Government, are surely bad for Britain—alas, they are likely to last for another nine months.

10.6 am

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I hope that the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) feels a lot better for getting that off his chest. It was a peroration reminiscent of John of Gaunt on his deathbed. I shall not attempt to follow him, but I wish him an extremely happy holiday.

I direct the House's attention to a matter that I consider to be of particular concern. I refer to a headline in yesterday's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*, which said, "Backwoodsmen save asylum Bill".

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Do you still read *The Daily Telegraph*?

Sir Patrick Cormack: Of course I do. I emulate the hon. Gentleman's wonderful example. However, I shall not allow him to distract me.

I refer to the headline because I think that it highlights a matter that ought to be of acute concern to all parliamentarians: the relationship between the two Houses, especially the future of the House of Lords. It is a great pity that we are adjourning for the summer recess and returning for a brief spillover session without provision for a debate on the constitution. The other week, the other place had a very fine two-day debate on the constitution, in which many admirable speeches were made—not on both sides of the argument but on every side of it, since it is a many-sided and multi-faceted argument.

We trifle with the delicate balance of our constitution at our peril. The Labour party's proposals are fraught with danger. However, my main reason for addressing the House is that I do not believe that one can defend the automatic right of every hereditary peer to sit, speak and vote in the House of Lords.

I speak as one who basically believes in the composition and powers of the House of Lords—the powers are about right. It is a revising Chamber, a Chamber with the power to delay and to tell us to think again. It has been an extremely good institution over the past 17 years. On a number of occasions, particularly in the days when we enjoyed a very large majority in this House, the House of Lords told us to think again. In doing so, it often exercised collective wisdom of a high degree of excellence.

I think in particular of the House of Lords' rejection of the War Crimes Bill. We were most unwise to override it on that occasion. Nevertheless, when we overrode their lordships, we were doing what was constitutionally proper. It was entirely legitimate for the Government of the day to override the Lords' decision on the basis that the will of the elected House should not be superseded. That is an admirable constitutional doctrine, to which I subscribe.

However, I do not subscribe—the Leader of the House will not be surprised to hear me say this as I have said it to him privately—to using so-called backwoodsmen to vote down what is manifestly the desire of a majority of the active, participating peers in the other place. I do not want to debate the merits of the Asylum and Immigration Bill this morning. Those who were present for the debate know that I am sympathetic to the three-day amendment that came from the House of Lords. Again, I do not question the constitutional propriety of the Government's attempt to overturn that amendment. Had the Lords inserted another amendment on Monday of this week, and had we debated it today, it would also have been entirely legitimate for the Government to try to persuade their supporters here to disagree with the Lords in their amendment.

However, it is most unwise, although constitutionally perfectly proper, to bring into the Division Lobbies in the other place peers who rarely attend or take part in the deliberations there and who come up specifically to vote after a debate in which they have taken no part. Of course they have the right to vote, just as Her Majesty the Queen has the right to refuse the Royal Assent to any Act of Parliament that we pass. No monarch since Queen Anne has exercised that right, and it would provoke a constitutional crisis of the utmost magnitude if Her Majesty ever did so. I believe that a similar reticence ought to possess many of the hereditary peers.

I happen to believe also that the House of Lords as constituted now has a great deal to commend it. I should hate to see it become the creature of placemen and party. The Cross-Bench element contributes enormously to our constitution, consisting as it does of men and women of great eminence and distinction debating issues on their merits without feeling that they have to look over their shoulders to party bosses or constituents. That has a great deal to commend it, too.

The active, regularly attending hereditary element in the other place, who include some extremely able young men and women, make a real contribution as well. By way of reform, and following the precedent of the Acts of Union of 1707 and 1801, I should like the hereditary peers to be confined to a certain number, selected on a basis to be agreed—perhaps elected by themselves. They include, as I say, many who are diligent in their attendance, eloquent in their contributions and emphatic in the mark that they make.

I must tell the Leader of the House, at a time when the whole future balance of Parliament is at issue, that it is unwise in the extreme to call out these "backwoodsmen" for particular votes such as the recent one.

Mr. Donald Anderson: The same happened with nursery vouchers.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Quite so. Again, I do not intend to discuss the merits of that argument. Suffice it to say that, in respect of the asylum arrangements, I was on the side of the Lords; on nursery vouchers I suspect that I would not be. That is neither here nor there. Using constitutional mechanisms that are in place is one thing; bringing out the backwoodsmen is quite another. By dint of those two recent unwise actions the Government have inflicted a wound—I sincerely hope not a fatal one—on the House of Lords.

I want the hereditary element to remain—in a monarchy it is important that it should—but I do not want every hereditary peer automatically to have the right to vote and speak in the House of Lords. I certainly do not want those who rarely exercise that right to be called in to rescue the Government from time to time.

I have felt moved to raise this subject above all because I deplore the fact that we have not had an opportunity to debate the constitution and the roles and positions of the two Houses during this Session. I hope that, when we

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

come back in October, my right hon. Friend will be persuaded to postpone Prorogation for just one day so that we can debate these matters. Failing that, I hope that we shall have a debate at the beginning of the next Session.

10.15 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Like the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), who had the guts to put his vote where his mouth was, I thought the rejection by this House of the three-day Lords amendment was a disgrace to our country. Meanwhile, I should like to ask five succinct questions.

My first question relates to the United Nations resolution on the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands. As the Leader of the House will know, the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, of which I am not a member, is being taken by its Chairman to Buenos Aires in the recess. I hope that there will be serious discussions with our colleagues on the matter of what they can say there about the question of sovereignty. There is a real opportunity to listen to what is being said in Argentina about this delicate subject. Judging by what we heard from Guido Di Tella, this morning on the radio and in person about two months ago, it appears that there is some kind of constructive solution to be had. So, before the whole thing goes sour, let the Government take action.

My second question relates to Iraq. Are the Government entirely happy with the seemingly unending mission led by Rolf Ekeus? In the Whitsun recess, the hon. Member for South Staffordshire led an all-party heritage delegation to Stockholm, where we naturally spent time talking to our Swedish colleagues. It emerged that people in the know in Stockholm—to put it at its very gentlest—entertain doubts about their colleague Ekeus and believe that the time is ripe for a change. It is certainly clear that his personal relations with the Iraqis, not just with the inner leadership, have become appalling. It is also beyond dispute that infant mortality in the Tigris and Euphrates valleys is so dreadful that it shames humanity. We are almost as far from the Gulf war now as we were from the second world war when we put Germany back on its feet. I therefore hope that the Government will take another look at that appalling human tragedy.

My third question concerns Cuba. It is perfectly clear to some of us that any pressure to stop trading with Cuba has nothing to do with the merits of the case and everything to do with internal American politics. I draw the attention of the House to Sunday's talk by Alistair Cooke. There is also a great deal of other evidence pointing to the idea that attitudes to Cuba reflect the internal situation in the United States. I do not see why British industry and trade should be disadvantaged.

The fourth issue concerns Libya, a subject on which I have had so many Adjournment debates. During the recess, can thought be given to a matter raised by President Mandela's delegation, which concerns the whole of Africa? Would not the situation be brought to a head by a trial in The Hague or, as has been offered, in South Africa itself? Otherwise, it will go on for a lifetime.

I am not in any way anti-American, but one does notice that Iraq and Libya were traditionally British markets, and that decision-makers in those countries were educated at British, not American, universities. However, it is British, and not American, industry that is losing out in those Arab countries. I hope that the Government will no longer act on the instructions—I think that that is the right word—on Libya given by Washington. Otherwise, the present situation will continue. The sanctions will be maintained—sanctions which, incidentally, are totally ignored by the Germans, the Greeks, the Italians and the French, while Britain and British industry lose out.

Finally, I wish to raise the matter of airport and aircraft security. Throughout this Session, I have endlessly raised the subject of the Lockerbie disaster of 1988, which led to major reviews in aviation security by both the British and American Governments. Eight years on, experts and campaigners for improved safety agree that it is still possible for bombs to be smuggled on board aircraft.

Among the specific measures that feature in post-Lockerbie reports, and which will now be readdressed by the investigation into the TWA flight if a bomb was to blame, is baggage reconciliation, as recommended by the International Civil Aviation Organisation in 1987. Its implementation is mandatory in the United Kingdom from this year, but is limited elsewhere. The rather grandiose term for the vital process of ensuring that every bag loaded on board is matched with a passenger is still a long way from being carried out around the world. Airlines are particularly vulnerable to baggage being transferred from connecting flights, and the bomb may make the whole journey while the passenger does not. Eight thousand bags a day are lost worldwide—yes, 8,000 a day. Is that not proof that reconciliation is just not working? How can people talk about baggage reconciliation and safety in those circumstances?

The second recommendation was made in the 1989 report "The Lessons of Lockerbie" by Paul Wilkinson, security expert from St. Andrews university. There is no worldwide watchdog organisation on air travel that has teeth. The UN's International Civil Aviation Organisation can make recommendations but has no power to enforce them. Wilkinson and his colleagues say that that does not have to be the case, and see the same organisation's International Atomic Energy Agency as a working model. Critics in the US highlight the fact that the body responsible for enforcing safety, the Federal Aviation Authority, also has the job of promoting air travel. It may be a little difficult to do both, and the Government should think about that.

The final recommendation—that better security equipment be provided—was made by Sheriff Principal John Mowat at the 1990 fatal accident inquiry into the Lockerbie disaster. Its implementation has been limited. Systems similar to supermarket bar codes, which would aid baggage reconciliation, are being introduced only gradually. Mowat said that better X-ray machines might have detected the Lockerbie bomb and—although one must not jump to conclusions about the TWA disaster—might have detected bombs elsewhere. Many people are concerned about that matter. Standards have improved in some airports, but many others have done very little.

I ask that serious consideration be given this summer to the kind of international authority proposed by Paul Wilkinson.

10.24 am

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I will be as brief as I can, and I am sorry that I have not given my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House notice of the point that I wish to

raise. Before I do raise the matter, I cannot let go the crass statements and nonsense from the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) about the Prime Minister's statement on the single currency, and implications about the hon. Gentleman's Government. Those need to be answered and hit hard.

The Prime Minister has—not once, but many times—stated at the Dispatch Box and elsewhere that until we know the terms of a single currency, the Government will not make a statement about what they feel about it. Any person who believes that he can make a proper statement without knowing the facts is dealing in Alice in Wonderland politics. If the Government decided that a single currency was in the nation's interests, there would be a referendum. That is clear, and needs no argument.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Peter Emery: No. The hon. Gentleman has had his say. He implied that the Government are on their last legs, but what is the alternative? He said that it is time for a change, but a change to what? Higher inflation? We have the lowest inflation in western Europe. Higher mortgage rates? We have low mortgage rates, and they are always higher under a Labour Government. Higher unemployment? Unemployment has been falling for four years, and it is always higher at the end of a Labour Government than it was at the beginning. We must know the alternative, and we must ensure that it is branded properly.

I wish to return to my main point, and again I apologise for not giving notice to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. I much object to the interference by an Opposition Front Bencher in what is an entirely constituency matter in Woodbury Salterton. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) gave me no notice of his question on the Order Paper, and that is wrong. He may be the Opposition's agriculture spokesman, but he should have the good manners to let me know what he is taking an interest in. If the hon. Gentleman had come to me, I could have told him what he is seeking.

The position is that rendered carcases and meat from non-BSE cattle are being stored in Greendale Barton in Woodbury Salterton. Any cattle with the disease, or from an infected herd, must be incinerated. That is the law, but a Liberal councillor is trying to create fear by criticising the Government, claiming that they are not doing their job properly by allowing the placement of this rendered material in a large agricultural store, which has been in existence now for 15 years or so, before being taken for incineration or disposal. That disposal cannot be done immediately, and there is not enough capacity to deal with the problem at the moment. The material must be stored somewhere, and it is in a proper store that is licensed and inspected by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

I ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to get a statement from MAFF to clarify what I am saying so that we can assure my constituents that they have nothing to fear from the storage of this rendered material in my constituency.

People should understand that the Government's policy must be to get on with the culling as fast as possible so that we can meet the requirements by October and get the ban on the export of British beef lifted. That entails a certain amount of storage around the country, including in Woodbury Salterton, but it is a measure to assist farmers and the British people to get agriculture back on its feet. That is why I raise the point. It is worrying that an Opposition Member should try to highlight something in my constituency which he could have clarified easily without stirring up problems.

10.30 am

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I wish to raise several points. I agree with many hon. Members that the House should not adjourn until the Minister of State for Defence Procurement takes a definite decision about procuring equipment that the forces will need shortly. I refer particularly to the Nimrod 2000 project. That has been held back by the Treasury, whose guesstimates have been wrong more than once. I sometimes wonder whether it has lost sight of the old adage, "Look after the pence and the pounds will look after themselves." It constantly watches the billions but fails to realise that money is lost at other levels. It has to foot the bills for other votes of supply because of unemployment. Firms have their patterns changed by the delays in deciding the contracts. I urge the Government to settle the issue quickly.

Secondly, I want to discuss intimidation. Some people in Northern Ireland claim that their community is being intimidated. In reality, far more people from the Protestant community have been put out of their homes in the past few weeks than have people from the Roman Catholic community. Tragically, our people do not claim compensation as they are not part of Sinn Fein-IRA's economic warfare against the House, the Government and our people in Northern Ireland.

It may surprise some hon. Members to learn that anyone who moves out of a Housing Executive home gets £175 for reallocation. A fair number of people who have claimed intimidation have been on waiting lists for some time and are seeking to jump the queue. They also blame the social services for not giving them the proper counselling needed for the pressure of economic warfare.

I wonder whether yesterday, when the Prime Minister met representatives of two smaller political parties in Northern Ireland, he got assurances from them that intimidation and extortion by loyalist paramilitaries will cease. I speak on behalf of constituents who in the past few weeks have been told that the ceasefire is over and that they must pay £100 a week. Some shopkeepers are asked to pay £20 weekly and larger firms pay £1,000 a year. The mythology of the ceasefire should not blind us to the reality that the forces of lawlessness have been dictating the terms in the Province.

I was interested to receive a letter from a lady in Preston who encourages us because we wish to remain in the United Kingdom. She said that she became interested in 1970 because she did not like to see small people pushed down. In that context, is there not some conflict between a Government policy that seeks to maintain the Union and discourages a form of devolution in Scotland, England and Wales but that has not only sought to restore a devolved Parliament in Northern Ireland but gone further down that road and allowed a foreign Government to have an unhealthy influence in the affairs of United Kingdom in that area? That lies behind much of the trouble.

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

We must consider the provocation that our people endure. As they travel through Belfast, they see tricolours flaunted from high-rise buildings, one bearing the slogan, "Drumcree church will burn". Where is that being told to the British people by the British media?

My last point concerns the responsibility of the media, and especially of the BBC. Was it without significance that Kate Adie was in Northern Ireland even before the walk to Drumcree? We are constantly told about the Protestant terrorists and paramilitaries, but the religious connection of the IRA is never mentioned. We must strike a balance and have responsible broadcasting. I have twice had to have corrections in respect of references wrongly attributed to me.

10.35 am

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise a constituency case. I realise that it is difficult for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to reply to a constituency case.

A constituent had a judicial separation hearing at Altrincham county court in the summer of 1995. His wife was legally represented because she was entitled to legal aid. My constituent was not so entitled because he was working, and had to represent himself because he could not afford to pay a lawyer and a barrister. The hearing lasted four hours, and it was decided that the wife should be awarded the matrimonial home, which has been paid off entirely. The husband had to pay the court costs amounting to about £1,000 and agreed to pay £400 monthly in maintenance. He also agreed with the court that, when he retired, he would commute £60,000 from his pension provision and pay a quarter of that to his wife so that she would get £15,000.

My constituent agreed finally that a £3,500 endowment policy due to mature this November should be shared between him and his wife. He accepted all that and, a few days after the court appearance, received a letter that stated the terms of the court order, to which he agreed. He was therefore surprised, a few weeks later, to receive another letter which amended the original order without explanation. He was then told that the endowment policy would go entirely to his wife rather than being split between them. He was disturbed about that, went to the court and asked for an explanation. He was shown the judge's handwritten memo, which clearly stated that the endowment policy was to be shared. He was also shown correspondence from the wife's lawyers, who had written to the judge requesting that he review the order. He had done so, amended it and ordered the whole endowment to go to the wife.

My constituent was never asked for his views. He wrote to the court and asked the judge for an explanation. He was told that the amended order was correct and that that was the end of the story. My constituent is entitled to know why the court was not reconvened and why he was not consulted. The decision was taken behind his back by the judge and his wife's legal representatives. He senses injustice, which I fully understand. He came to my advice bureau because he had tried every other means to get his grievance rectified, but to no avail. Because, in my innocence, I believed that my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor was responsible for the judiciary, I wrote to him about the case. I had a reply dated 6 March from my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Lord Chancellor's Department, which stated:

"As you are aware the Court Service became an Executive Agency on 3 April 1995. As your correspondence concerns matters relating to operational aspects of the Courts, the Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to pass it to the Chief Executive of the Court Service . . . to reply."

Meanwhile, my constituent had been trying desperately hard to obtain the necessary information—all he seeks is some redress. A letter dated 12 January from the office of the courts administrator in Manchester stated:

"I accept that you should have been given an explanation of the circumstances leading to the 2nd amendment to the order and for this omission I sincerely apologise.

Turning to your points regarding correspondence being entered into between the other side, the Court and the Judge without consideration to yourself I note that you also wrote to the Court to request amendment to the original order, albeit minor alterations, and that the order was duly amended. The petitioner's solicitors suggested that the order be reviewed and this request was relayed"

to the judge. The letter adds that the judge could have reconvened a hearing

"but it would appear that he did not feel that that course of action was necessary. I am not able to comment on the decision of members of the Judiciary."

I eventually received a reply from the chief executive of the Court Service on 25 March, in which he stated that while he understood my constituent's feelings,

"I regret there is little I can add to the replies he received from the Courts Administrator at Manchester and the Customer Service Unit here at Headquarters. I enclose copies for your information. You will appreciate that the judiciary are entirely independent of Government and therefore have complete freedom in the way they deal with the cases that come before them."

My constituent was of course not happy with that reply, so I pursued the matter with the Court Service, which replied on 18 April:

"It may be helpful if I explain that if"

my constituent

"does not agree with a particular part of the amended order, it is open to him to apply to the court to have the order varied. I enclose an application form should he wish to do so. I should stress, however, that the decision whether to allow his application rests with the judge who hears the matter. I would also strongly advice your constituent to seek legal advice before making any application to the court."

My constituent senses injustice. Because he is not entitled to legal aid, he would have to represent himself yet again. He has been told to appeal, but cannot afford to take the risk. The amount at stake is £1,750—50 per cent. of the value of the endowment policy. If my constituent won an appeal, he would retain that sum. If he lost, he would receive nothing and be faced with a substantial legal bill.

The judge involved is apparently a member of the Solicitors Family Law Association. My constituent felt so strongly that he complained to the association's complaints bureau, but was told that his complaint could not be accepted and that he had no redress. This country's legal aid system should be carefully examined. If my constituent had been legally represented, it could have been a different story.

My constituent has signed over the matrimonial home, paid the court costs of the original hearing, and agreed to pay his wife £400 per month maintenance and 25 per cent.

of his pension commutation on retirement. Why was the judge able to change his mind on the sharing of the endowment policy? Why did the judge listen only to the wife's legal representatives? Why did not the judge reconvene the hearing and give my constituent the chance to put his case? If British justice is the best in the world, it must not only be fair but be seen to be fair. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House can undertake some investigation before the House rises for the summer recess and explain why my constituent has been given no proper explanation, why the judge is apparently not answerable to anyone and where my constituent should go for justice.

10.43 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I declare an interest as chairman of the Commonwealth parliamentary Cyprus group.

On Sunday 14 July, the annual Cyprus rally was held in Trafalgar square, when 5,000 people gathered to remember the events of July 1974, when Cyprus was invaded by the Turkish army. Twenty-two years later, Cyprus remains a divided country. The occupied northern area is still under the control of the Turkish army, using an estimated 30,000 troops and military equipment.

Many hon. Members, irrespective of party, work closely together for a united Cyprus and the rights and freedoms of Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Britain is deeply involved in the Cyprus situation. It is one of the island's guarantor powers, and Cyprus is a member of the Commonwealth. Discussions have been held over the years, but hopes of an honourable settlement have not been realised. Many distinguished individuals have studied the Cyprus tragedy and their views are clear. They include the Secretary-General of United Nations. In reports, he and others have plainly put the blame for the lack of progress on Mr. Denktash, who leads the Turkish-Cypriot community.

None of the events that has occurred since 1974 has helped to resolve the Cyprus issue. Mr. Denktash made a unilateral declaration of independence to seek, he claimed, an independent Turkish republic in occupied northern Cyprus. That achieved nothing. Years after that declaration, only one country in the world recognises that so-called independent state—Turkey. Over the years, an estimated 80,000 people from mainland Turkey have been brought to occupied northern Cyprus. They are known to Turkish Cypriots as illegal settlers. Many true Turkish Cypriots have left their homeland because they are not prepared to live alongside the people whom Mr. Denktash has brought from the mainland.

Earlier this year, Mr. Denktash made a statement regarding the 1,600 Greek Cypriots who were declared missing after the 1974 invasion. He said nothing more than that those people were dead. He gave no explanation of how they were killed and he did not say where their remains were buried. I asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further action the British Government, as one of the guarantor powers, would take to secure further details from Mr. Denktash. On 29 April, the Minister of State replied:

> "Mr. Denktash's remarks bring an opportunity for all concerned to renew their efforts towards resolving this tragic and long-standing issue."

I hope that the work of the UN committee on mercy and people can progress speedily, and that all parties will continue to give it their full support. Although I welcome the Minister's sentiments, the British Government have made no commitment to seek a dialogue with Mr. Denktash to discover what happened to the 1,600 people Mr. Denktash says were killed—but whom Turkish Cypriots say were murdered.

At the time of the 1974 invasion, thousands of Greek Cypriots lived in the Karpass area of northern Cyprus. Today, only 500 people live there. Many people have visited the Karpass area, including Lord Finsberg, who went only this year. He has spoken to me about the deep concern that he saw and felt about the denial of human rights to those people. To his credit, he has tried to improve the conditions of the people who live there. I highlight that incident because, in March this year, Members of the European Parliament sought permission from Mr. Denktash to go and visit the area. He refused.

I tabled a question on 1 July to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs asking what discussions he was having with Mr. Denktash. The reply was:

> "The Turkish Cypriot leadership is well aware of our views on the need to revoke the remaining restrictions on the basic freedoms in the Karpass."—[*Official Report*, 1 July 1996; Vol. 280, c. 278.]

That is yet another reason why many of us in the House who genuinely seek an honourable settlement in Cyprus are deeply concerned at the actions of Mr. Denktash.

We are not talking about some faraway country; we are talking about a country that is a member of the Commonwealth and for which this country is one of the guarantor powers. There are many other issues that one could raise. A year ago, I, along with other hon. Members on both sides of the House, initiated a debate on Famagusta—a city today regarded as a ghost town. No one lives there. It was once one of the most prosperous areas of Cyprus. We have had promise after promise over the years from Mr. Denktash that Famagusta will be returned to the Republic of Cyprus. Nothing whatever has happened.

Recently, the Government—I applaud them for this—appointed Sir David Hannay as their special Cyprus envoy. I have met Sir David and I warmly welcome his appointment, but I should like to find out exactly how the Government see Sir David's specific role and how they will respond to his reports and proposals. When I met Sir David some three weeks ago, he gave a clear indication that he intended to play a very active role in seeking an honourable settlement to this long-running tragedy.

I believe, as do many hon. Members, that there is at long last real hope for an honourable settlement in Cyprus. That hope is Cyprus's application for membership of the European Union. The next two countries due for consideration are Cyprus and Malta. In the view of many of us, there is no doubt that, if Cyprus becomes a member of the European Union, benefits will go—as I want—to northern Cyprus. Report after report tells us that the economy in northern Cyprus is on its knees. It gives me no pleasure to say that or know it because, sadly, ordinary men and women suffer as a result of the enormous problems that the economy in northern Cyprus now faces.

I hope that the British Government will give us clear assurances that they will support the application of Cyprus for membership of the European Union. What worries hon. Members on both sides of the House is that, more and more, we get what we term the hedge. The Government say, "Oh yes, we are considering it, but only

[Mr. Tom Cox]

when there is a settlement." We all want a settlement, but I and many hon. Members believe that there should be no delay in consideration of Cyprus's application for membership. That consideration should be based on the fact that, even if by then there has not been a settlement, the application for EU membership will be determined on its merits. Many of us believe that that is the only criterion that should be followed in the application that Cyprus is making for membership.

As I have said several times in this short speech, Britain has clear responsibilities for Cyprus. We want a settlement for the benefit of the two communities of Cypriots. Whether they are Greek or Turkish, they are Cypriots. We want only one Cyprus, and that is the Republic of Cyprus.

10.54 am

Sir Michael Neubert (Romford): Thank you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this debate on the last day before the House rises for the summer recess. Under the old dispensation, we should argue that the House should not rise before urgent action is taken or pressing decisions are made. That is certainly the case with the matter that I wish to raise this morning, which is the return of the Stone of Scone to Scotland, which was announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 3 July. On 16 July, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland issued a consultation paper. The consultation is to be for one month only, until 16 August.

It is almost certain that the decision on this important matter will be taken before we reassemble in October and absolutely certain that the consultation will finish in a little more than three weeks. This is an example of a familiar phenomenon in public life—controversial proposals are put out for consultation in the holiday month of August. Everyone who has concerns about the matter on both sides of the border would need to be on the alert to make sure that their views were made known. I make known my views this morning in this last opportunity here in the House of Commons.

The return of the Stone of Scone has already been raised by my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker), who was quick off the mark with his Adjournment debate yesterday week. I congratulate him on it. There was undoubtedly an element of surprise in the announcement. When the notice, "Statement: Stone of Destiny" went up on the annunciator screens, like many another I wondered what it could be about. Had the stone been stolen again? There was scarcely eager expectation of the announcement. It was that rare thing in modern politics—a decision that was not the subject of a disreputable leak or flagrant breach of confidentiality. It is a matter for commendation that that was so. Certainly the 700th anniversary this year of the removal of the Stone of Scone gave point to the announcement, and a pretext for it.

I greet the decision with some scepticism. I speak, of course, as a Sassenach—with some temerity, surrounded this morning by Scots—from well south of the border. As a Londoner born and bred, and I cannot see how these matters look from Scotland, but I doubt whether it is possible to rearrange hundreds of years of history by such a gesture.

If I speak briefly of the history of the stone, I do so as a non-historian, drawing heavily on advice. The stone consists of sandstone of a type apparently found in the Scone area and other areas of the world. It is part of the early history that is myth, but it is recorded that in 1249 Alexander III was crowned on the stone. In the late summer of 1296—hence the 700th anniversary of its removal—the stone was removed from Scone. In June 1297, the stone was formally presented to St. Edward, with the other Scottish regalia—the crown and sceptre. A bronze chair to house the stone was ordered, but in 1300 an account was presented for making a wooden chair. There had obviously been some restraint on public expenditure, which has an echo to this day.

A chair was eventually made of wood to house the stone found at Scone on which the kings of Scotland used to be crowned. Every coronation except one since 1399, or possibly as far back as 1307, has taken place in the chair. The only monarch not to be crowned and anointed on the chair was Mary Tudor, who regarded it as tainted by her Protestant predecessor.

That was the stone's early history. Then, in 1328, came the treaty of Northampton, which has been cited as one good reason for returning the stone as an overdue obligation, finally to be fulfilled by our generation. I am told, however, that the treaty of Northampton, made at Edinburgh and later ratified at Northampton, makes no mention of returning the stone.

The English and Scottish copies of the text of the treaty were lost. The 18th century Scottish historian Lord Hailes, in his "Annals of Scotland", attempted to reconstruct the terms from chronicle accounts, but copies of the terms have subsequently been recovered, and Hailes has been shown to have been wrong in some details, including provision for the return of the stone.

It is therefore incorrect to state that the Government are belatedly honouring the terms of a treaty by returning the stone to Scotland. The writ that orders the abbot of Westminster to surrender the stone, which refers to an agreement made at Northampton, refers not to the treaty with the Scots, but to a decision of the English king's council. There were no Scots present at Northampton with whom an agreement could have been made.

I am indebted for that advice to Richard Mortimer, keeper of muniments at Westminster abbey. He says that one of the myths gathering round the stone is that it once bore the inscription:

"Ni fallat fatum, Scoti, quocunque locatum
Invenient lapidem, regnare tenentur ibidem".

Fortunately, it is translated as:

"If the fates go right, where'er this stone is found
The Scots shall monarchs of that realm be crowned."

That prophecy was held to be fulfilled when James VI was crowned James I of England. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] James left the stone at Westminster abbey, which he also chose as the burial place of his mother, Mary Queen of Scots. The presence of the stone at Westminster is therefore symbolic of the Union of the Crown.

For 300 years or so after that, there was nothing of report except that, in 1653, the chair and stone were removed to Westminster Hall for the inauguration of Oliver Cromwell as the lord protector, and then replaced. During the second world war, the chair was removed to Gloucester cathedral and the stone buried in the abbey. In 1950, as we know, the stone was stolen. That is when it enters modern consciousness.

That is the history and the context. Obviously it would be wrong to seek to change a decision already announced by the Prime Minister and approved by Her Majesty the Queen—that is beyond my ambitions or intentions at this or any other time—so I wish to concentrate on the choice of the new location, which I regard as extremely important. One can understand the dismay of the dean and chapter of Westminster. I quote from their official statement on the day of the announcement:

"as the successor of those abbots of Westminster and Deans and Chapters who have been guardians of the stone for so many centuries, we must continue to urge those who are advising the Queen in this matter to take full account of the symbolic and emotional significance of the stone, its integral connection with the Coronation Chair and its intimate association with the sacrament of Coronation."

My purpose is to emphasise the stone's religious associations—an aspect that received little attention at the time of the original announcement. It is appropriate and desirable for the stone to be found a new resting place on consecrated ground, a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) in his question to the Prime Minister on 3 July. My hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside supported that principle in his bid to have the stone returned to Scone in his constituency.

I speak from the standpoint of my role as parliamentary warden of St. Margaret's and a member of the abbey family. Any decision as to the new location must reflect not only the constitutional importance of the stone to the United Kingdom, but the sacred mysteries of the coronation, to which our present monarch memorably and movingly pledged herself at the time of her coronation in 1953.

It is not easy from this distance to suggest where a suitable site might be found. My hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside suggested that there might be a site near the ruins of Scone abbey. St. Margaret's chapel in Edinburgh castle has been suggested as one option for the future by the Prime Minister. Another option would be St. Giles' cathedral, which I visited for a magnificent organ recital during the Edinburgh festival last August. It would seem most akin to the present position in Westminster abbey.

Inevitably, given its history, consideration of security for the stone will be an important factor, as will an appropriately dignified setting to match the sovereign symbolism of the stone for the Union. I make a plea that tourism be not paramount. It is true that, at Westminster abbey, it is now visited by 2.2 million people a year, a number exceeded only by that of visitors to the tower of London, but I ask that tourism not be the overriding consideration.

It would be nothing short of desecration if a stone that is already to be moved backward and forward between Scotland and England at the time of future coronation were to be lodged insensitively as part of a "Come to Scotland" campaign and not secured in the religious character that is its essence. The stone was, after all, the votive offering to Edward the Confessor of Edward I.

I look to the Government to respect those religious associations and to find a resting place for the stone that reconciles all those different interests and provides a fitting home for that all-important symbol of our historic Union.

11.5 am

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to raise an issue that has become public in recent days, which intimately concerns many of my constituents—the level of radiation around the old Greenham Common air base and in the rest of my constituency and adjoining constituencies. It is feared that there may now be, or have been in the past, some health risks associated with that radiation.

As you will know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have tabled several questions for written answer to the Secretaries of State for Defence and for Health, which I hope that they will answer. I shall refer to some of those questions today because, although I realise that the Leader of the House may be unable to answer some of them, I hope that he will ensure that the Secretaries of State concerned provide an appropriate answer, with all possible speed, given the profound worries of some of my constituents about those matters.

The issue arose from an article in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 14 July, when it reported on a leak that had been made to it, apparently by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, of a report written in 1961 by two Aldermaston scientists, Mr. Cripps and Mr. Stimpson. They reported at that time that they had found an increased level of uranium and radiation coming from uranium in the area around the Greenham Common air base in a sort of hourglass shape. That suggested that the runway at the air base had been at some point contaminated with uranium, which had been taken up on the wheels or wings of aeroplanes leaving the air base, and thus had been spread in both directions from either end of the air base runway.

Mr. Cripps and Mr. Stimpson said that the contamination must have resulted from some form of nuclear accident on the air base, and the only one that they could highlight was an accident that was known to have taken place on 28 February 1958, when a B47 bomber had to drop two of its fuel tanks; one hit a hangar and the other hit another B47 on the ground. Mr. Cripps and Mr. Stimpson assumed that it must have caused some sort of radiation leak, probably from a nuclear bomb on the bomber. There is considerable evidence that that was not the case, but that information raised understandable worries among many of my constituents.

One of the important questions that needs to be answered is why the Cripps and Stimpson report produced in 1961 was kept secret until it was leaked to *The Daily Telegraph*. I wrote to the Secretary of State for Defence to ask him to place a copy of the report in the Library, and I am happy to say that he promptly did so. In his letter to me confirming that he would do that, he wrote:

"I can . . . confirm that the 1961 report has been reviewed during the course of the day"—

on 15 July this year—

"and we have concluded that it can be downgraded and released to the Public Record Office."

It is now much more than 30 years since the report was produced in 1961, so why was it not released to the Public Record Office on 1 January 1992, in line with the normal 30-year rule? There must be some reason why the Government decided that it would not be released at that time. As it was so easily released once it had been leaked and, as those of us who have had a chance to see the

[Mr. David Rendel]

report know, as there seems to have been no good reason for keeping the report secret for so long, the Government must say why they kept it secret until last week.

Another report, which is believed to have been written by a man called W. M. Saxby in 1987, also refers to radiation around Newbury and the air base. It is rumoured that, as a result of that report, the Government changed their decision about the classification of the original 1961 report. Why has the Saxby report not been released? Can it now be released to reassure my constituents about its content?

Openness and honesty about both those reports are now required if my constituents' confidence is to be regained. Several questions remain to be answered. What happened during that accident? What was the result of it? Was any uranium involved in the 1958 accident? As there seems to be sound evidence that the bomber may not have had a bomb on board at the time, could a different source of uranium have led to the later contamination of the area, either on the bomber or in the hangar, which was also destroyed? What then happened to the debris from the accident? The hangar was virtually destroyed and had to be taken down and replaced with a new one, and the bomber was burnt out. But what happened to the debris, which may have contained some form of uranium? Was it buried somewhere and, if so, was it buried on the site or elsewhere? What monitoring has since been done to reassure local residents that the debris, wherever it might be, is not contaminated?

It is understood that up to eight reports have been written about the accident by both the British Government and the United States air force. Those should now be made known and copies placed in the Library so that everybody can see exactly what happened, what happened to the remains of the accident, and what further steps are being taken to ensure that they are kept safe.

A further question is: where might the raised levels of uranium and radiation have come from if they did not arise from that accident? The Cripps and Stimpson report found genuinely higher uranium levels than would normally have been expected in the surrounding area. If the Government are to continue with their line, which I have no reason to disbelieve, that the uranium cannot have come from the 1958 accident, which was originally blamed, the question arises as to where that excessive uranium came from. Was there another accident on the Greenham air base that may have caused it? What tests have been carried out since that date to discover whether those high radiation levels still exist and, if so, where they may have come from? Do the Government now propose to carry out further tests, given the increased concern that has now arisen?

My next two questions are about health and illustrate why further tests may now be necessary. A few years ago, there was a scare about a cluster of childhood cancers around Aldermaston and Burghfield, and various epidemiological surveys and tests were done to see how they could have arisen. Although no clear answers came out, the surveys and tests showed a significant increase in childhood cancers in that area. The Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment investigated the case, but it is not clear whether it knew about the Cripps and Stimpson report and was given the full details of the accident in 1958, which might have affected its decision on how those cancer clusters arose.

Most important in terms of the modern position is that, sadly, there is now a cluster of leukaemia cases in a small section of Newbury town. Three cases in one road alone have arisen within the past few years. Even to a layman, that is an unusually high incidence of leukaemia. Several related diseases seem also to be at comparatively high levels. Whatever happened in 1958 and whatever the Cripps and Stimpson report shows, we must find out whether the high number of leukaemia cases in a small area of Newbury town is significant statistically and, if so, how the cases may have arisen and whether they could be related to the radiation that was previously discovered. What epidemiological and other tests do the Government propose, to see what the causes of an excessive leukaemia rate could be? Naturally, my constituents are concerned that it could be connected to the high radiation levels in the area, so that must be investigated.

For far too long, there has been excessive secrecy over this matter. While that might have been necessary in the cold war days when the report was first produced in 1961, I cannot see why such secrecy should be necessary in the 1990s. Those days are surely gone and now secrecy can only increase my constituents' worry. My constituents now demand truth and honesty. The secrecy must end.

11.16 am

Sir David Madel (South–West Bedfordshire): First, I thank my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for the way in which he has conducted the business this year and for the fact that he has been able to give us more notice of what we are to discuss.

I wish to raise three brief points, the first of which is on education. This year's settlement has done great good by getting more money into the classroom. The Government must go further and get even more money out of county halls and into the classroom, and, in what remains of this Parliament, I hope, they will be able to do that by means of the new Education Bill.

I wish my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment all the best in the current discussions on state spending. She attained a good settlement for this year and we want an equally good settlement for next year. When the GCSE and A-level results come out next month, they will show a further improvement. Higher standards in the classroom are Government policy. The higher the standards, the more young people expect to go on to higher education.

I hope that the Dearing inquiry into the future of higher education will not cut across the expectations and hopes of young people and their parents as standards in the classroom rise. With the escalator taking young people into university going up, it would be extremely unfortunate if Sir Ron Dearing came out with a policy that somehow made the escalator go down and that made it more difficult for parents to help to get young people into university. That inquiry is a terrific challenge and it is vital that it recognises that standards in the classroom are going up, which inevitably means more demand for higher education.

Secondly, I raise the issue of the Child Support Agency, which is still not functioning properly. I do not blame Ministers for that but, to paraphrase the former leader of the Liberal party, the former right hon. Member for Caernarvon Boroughs, Ministers must not create a bomb shelter in which the Child Support Agency can shield

itself from the splinters of public criticism. I shall give the House two examples. The first concerns a constituent whose wife left him and went to Australia, leaving him with custody of the children. It has taken a long time and much effort to make the CSA understand that he is responsible for the children and that there can be no maintenance because his ex-wife is living in Australia and has nothing to do with them.

One would think that the CSA could simply check with Bedfordshire local education authority to satisfy itself that the children are registered in Bedfordshire schools and that their father is responsible for them. However, it has taken months to get the message across to the CSA. Last month, my constituent received three contradictory letters within a week from the agency.

My second example concerns a constituent whose daughter went to live with my constituent's ex-husband. He was in employment and not on income support, so that did not trigger the Child Support Agency, and the daughter, who is approaching the age of 18, has been working for 12 months. Therefore, why is the CSA pursuing the mother for maintenance? It will require the patience of the archangel Gabriel and the wisdom of Solomon to resolve that matter. It is just another example of the CSA failing to do its work properly.

As the amount of overtime increases in certain industries, the CSA must be extra careful about calculating the level of maintenance to be paid. I have often told the CSA that overtime is not automatic; it is like the Cheshire cat—now you see it and now you don't. The CSA must not automatically include overtime in the usual weekly wage or the monthly salary when making maintenance calculations. It must be fast-footed and flexible in its calculations.

I hope that the CSA will improve one day. However, after another parliamentary Session during which I have battled on behalf of my constituents, I think that it has a long way to go, first, to attain the standards of public service outlined in the citizens charter; and, secondly, to improve communication channels with the public about its actions in relation to demands for maintenance.

Thirdly, I refer briefly to the extremely difficult industrial disputes in the Post Office and on the tube. I think that we must increase the powers of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service in order to resolve those matters. At present, ACAS can intervene only if both parties are willing—it has a semi-voluntary role. Once a case is before ACAS and the parties have agreed voluntarily to refer their dispute to it, two things should occur: industrial action should be suspended together with any management proposals that may have triggered the strike. Both sides of industry should make an equal effort while ACAS tries to resolve the dispute. If the industrial dispute is hopelessly deadlocked with no movement on either side, ACAS should have the power to intervene. If neither side will co-operate, the law should be changed to allow civil action to be taken in the courts and damages awarded.

I think that it will take most of August to resolve those extremely difficult disputes. Public opinion regarding industrial disputes moves slowly, but above all people want to see efforts being made to resolve them. The current disputes will not be resolved in front of the television cameras or on the "Today" programme: they will be resolved only under the umbrella of ACAS, without publicity stunts. I propose a small change in the law that would give ACAS greater powers to intervene. It has been resolving industrial relations disputes for 21 years and I believe that it is time to give it greater powers.

In conclusion, during the remainder of this Parliament the Government must continue to pursue policies that give greater job security, as it is the feeling of job insecurity that is making life difficult for Conservative Members. Post-1949, the Christian Democrats in Germany won five elections in a row because their policies of low inflation and low unemployment proved successful. There is no reason why the Conservative party should not do the same. Our priority must be to ensure that our economic policies give greater job security to all workers. If that can be achieved, we shall wake up on a fine May morning next year and find that the United Kingdom has a fifth Conservative Government.

11.24 am

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Sir D. Madel) referred to the industrial disputes involving the underground and the postal workers. He could refer them to ACAS until he is blue in the face, but there is one relatively simple solution: treat the workers like those in this place.

For instance, the postal workers are trying to get Saturdays off. At present they must work a six-day week: that is the core of the dispute. Members of Parliament come to this place for four days a week, and 10 Fridays in the year are constituency days—I will not call them days off. Hon. Members do not have to work a six-day week unless they choose to do so. Nobody drags Members of Parliament here, kicking and screaming that they do not want to do the job. Whenever there is a vacancy, there are plenty of people willing to fill it.

If the Government want to act decently, they should say to those involved in the postal dispute, "Why can't the workers have a five-day week like many other people?" It is not asking for the moon. What is more, the postal workers held a ballot and a massive majority voted for industrial action. The same is true of the underground. The main part of the workers' claim is to reduce their working week by one hour. Tories talk about breaking the back of the British economy, but those two disputes are about having Saturdays off and a one-hour reduction in the working week.

It is appalling that we must listen to attacks on the wealth creators in society—the workers—who are asking for relatively small concessions. I would go a lot further. With 4 million people out of work—that is the real figure—we must crack unemployment in Britain. We could do that by opting for a four-day week for everyone. What is the point of having technology coming out of our ears if we are calling upon people to work five and six days a week—as well as overtime—amounting to a 48-hour week or more? We should talk about harnessing that technology to enable everyone to work a four-day week.

Now that I have got that off my chest, I turn to the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Committee—who has now left the Chamber. He got on his high horse about an hon. Member tabling a question about his constituency. He said that that was terrible: his area was being invaded. I remember speaking not so long ago at Coalite in my constituency,

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

where two farmers had stopped their production because of high dioxin levels. Hey presto, shortly afterwards I looked at the Order Paper and found that there was a question from a Tory Member of Parliament—it was obviously planted—asking the relevant Minister to explain to the House what the dioxin at Coalite was all about. Coalite is in my constituency, but I did not whine or whinge; I know that that is how Parliament works. I have a vague idea—I do not wish to put words into anyone's mouth—that Ministers in the next Labour Government might ask me to table planted questions. I shall tell them to ask someone else, but I am sure that it will happen.

I come now to several issues of which the Leader of the House is aware. He served for some time as Secretary of State for Social Security and he is familiar with many areas that may appear complicated to some people. I refer to the chronic bronchitis and emphysema legislation. The Leader of the House knows that Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Sir G. Lofthouse), who represents a Yorkshire mining constituency, eventually succeeded in getting that legislation on to the statute book. Everyone knows that it does not work exceptionally well. The success rate is only 11 per cent, which is not high by anyone's standards. Thousands of miners who are coughing their lungs up have put in a claim, and only 11 per cent. have been successful.

Loads of us knew immediately that we had to do something about that. Many hon. Members—most of them are in the Chamber now—made representations at different levels. As members of the miners parliamentary group, we met the Trades Union Congress and put forward an argument that we had cobbled together with our hon. Friends. The FEV1—forced expiratory volume—test was not working properly because it provided a better opportunity for someone with a bigger physique than for someone with a smaller physique. The deterioration in lung capacity should not be decided by how big people are, so we said that that should be altered.

We said that it was unfair that people had to work 20 years underground to qualify and that no one on the surface should qualify, because people take in a lot of dust on the surface. We also proposed getting rid of the X-ray, because most people concluded that it was superfluous to the whole exercise. We campaigned on those issues. We took up the matter with the TUC, which took up our demands. It went to the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council, which the Leader of the House knows only too well. It is generally accepted that, when the council makes recommendations to the Government of the day, they accept them.

Those recommendations have been with the Government probably for the whole of this year, so it is high time that they told us what they are going to do. We believe that they should accept the recommendations. We have reason to believe that they have not accepted all our ideas—I wish they had. Notwithstanding that, we think that they should now be put before the failed recipients.

Yesterday, in Social Security questions, it was drawn to the attention of everyone who has studied the issue that the old-fashioned special hardship allowance, which became the reduced earnings allowance, is in a big administrative muddle. It is clear that a substantial number of people were given the reduced earnings allowance, and they were told by the Government that they had it for life. Now there is a new Government proposal to reduce the amount from roughly £36 to about £9 and to have what is called a retirement allowance. The net result is that people have lost £27, or whatever, out of that £36.

That is a problem in itself. Literally thousands of people in every coalfield are affected, as are people in other industries of course, but we all appreciate that, because of the physical aspects of mining, a considerable number of those affected used to work in the coal mines. They have lost that money.

It is clear that the Government should resolve that problem. I have again a simple recommendation. The Leader of the House knows the facts well. The matter involves part of the Department that he used to run. He should say, "Look. There is only one way to clear this up. Never mind going backwards and forwards to commissioners, appeals and all the rest. The Government have made a mistake and should allow the reduced earnings allowance to continue." I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) is listening, because she can make that proposal when the next Labour Government get into power, and tell the putative Chancellor of the Exchequer that we shall need the money.

Many things in social security need to be sorted out by the next Labour Government. I am not expecting them all to be sorted out in the first year. I will be moderate on that issue, but we have been hammered on the social security front. The welfare state has almost been torn apart by the Government. I say that en passant. We shall probably hear a lot more about it from Conservative Members after May, or whenever the general election is, when I shall be sitting in the seat of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath).

There have been strikes by firefighters in Derbyshire, as there were in Merseyside some time ago. As we all know, there is a problem with firefighting and with how much money can go into it. Local authorities have been deprived of money. There have been cuts in Derbyshire in the past six years. The net result is that there are problems in coming to some form of agreement.

I have made it clear that I am on the side of the Fire Brigades Union. That will not surprise many people, but it is a problem. People cannot afford to act the fool when they are talking about people who have to put out fires. Not so long ago, hon. Members talked in the House about the three firefighters who had been killed, all within the space of a few weeks. People were saying that it was terrible. Every time there is a disaster in Britain, people say that the firefighters are doing a wonderful job, that they were first on the scene and all the rest of it.

What I have asked for is simple. Along with my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), I have asked to meet the Home Secretary to put the case and to try to get the cap lifted by the Secretary of State for the Environment, so that we can resolve the problem and take account of the transition to a new fire authority next year.

With local government changes, it will be a problem not for Derbyshire county council, but for Derby and Derbyshire. Therefore, it is imperative that the firefighters know that, when the new authority comes into being, the financial base will be better than at present.

I compliment the Leader of the House because, when I raised the matter last time, he said that he would consider it and produced a letter from the Home Secretary. I know that he is never out of court and that he is a busy man—he has to keep defending himself; he is a bit of a recidivist. Nevertheless, he sent a letter to me saying that he did not have time to meet me, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield and my hon. Friend the Member for North–East Derbyshire.

I thought that it was general practice in this place that, if Members of Parliament made representations to meet a Minister, somehow or other, we would be able to meet him or someone from his Department. We are finding it extremely difficult. We are not on some errand, but trying to resolve the problem. We are trying to put out fires—a different kind of fire—on behalf of the firefighters.

The Leader of the House has gone so far. He has stirred the loins of the Home Secretary. We want the firefighters and Derbyshire county council to have the opportunity to meet the Home Secretary so that they can put their case, with a view to ensuring that the matter is resolved and, when the transitional authority takes over next year, that the financial base can be secure, so that fires can be put out in Derbyshire and elsewhere.

11.37 am

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): It is important that I declare an interest. My interest is in Gilbert and Sullivan. It is important that the House realises that what I am going to say is a direct result of an unashamed interest in preserving for all time the works of Gilbert and Sullivan, which have made an essential and unique contribution to our English national heritage.

Some months ago, the House became aware of the danger—I think it is a new danger—facing the much-loved D'Oyly Carte Gilbert and Sullivan light opera touring company. The problem, when the curtain fell at the end of May, was whether it would ever rise again. The difficulty has simply been how to find some 20 per cent. of the money needed annually to run the D'Oyly Carte. The other 80 per cent.—amounting to £2 million—is raised from box office receipts, from private subscriptions and from local authority support. Just the remaining 20 per cent.—the £500,000—is needed to keep going the D'Oyly Carte company. which has been running for over 100 years.

The problem is that the Arts Council is the proper vehicle for funding the arts—it does a very good job, but it seems to have some failings. It tends to like grand opera, so the Royal Opera House, wonderful work though it does, receives 80 per cent. of its income from the Arts Council and has to raise the remaining 20 per cent. from private sources. On the other hand, the D'Oyly Carte has to raise 80 per cent. privately and needs only 20 per cent. from public subscription. There is a similar story with other companies that favour grand opera. When the Welsh Opera performs Verdi, Puccini and the like, it is favoured rather than Gilbert and Sullivan. Such funding offers grand opera to the privileged and wealthy. I have nothing against that, but those companies are getting the strawberries and cream, by 80 per cent. of public funding for their enjoyment.

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend should not place too much emphasis on the figure of 80 per cent. at the Royal Opera House. He might find, on research, that that figure is not precisely accurate.

Mr. Steen: Obviously, if a former Secretary of State for National Heritage tells me that the figure of 80 per cent. is too high, I bow to his knowledge. The figure may be 70 per cent. or 60 per cent., but it is certainly very high and, in cash terms, the figure received from the taxpayer is about £14 million, whereas the amount given to the D'Oyly Carte and Gilbert and Sullivan has, at the highest, been only £30,000 a year and, at the lowest, £15,000.

If the D'Oyly Carte and Gilbert and Sullivan are part of our national heritage, perhaps they should be treated a little more generously—perhaps more in line with the grand opera approach of the Arts Council. Tens of thousands of people want an evening's entertainment in a language that they understand. It is no good going to grand opera and listening to Italian, French and German—most of the tens of thousands of people in the provinces want to hear a light operetta in English. From Birmingham to Glasgow and from Coventry to Plymouth, people flood to theatres in their droves and leave feeling better and happier. Whenever I go to see a Gilbert and Sullivan production, I come out in a merry mood, whistling some of the infectious tunes.

Mr. Skinner: Go on—whistle them.

Mr. Steen: I will not whistle one now, although it is tempting.

Gilbert and Sullivan is as much part of the British culture as cream teas, cricket at Lord's or the unpredictability of the weather.

I shall explain what has happened, as I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House want to understand the facts. I am delighted that the former Secretary of State for National Heritage has not yet had to leave for his doctor's appointment as he can put the facts right if I should get anything wrong in the next few minutes.

The D'Oyly Carte operated without any grants from 1880 to about 1982—102 years. In 1987, the company was reformed, sponsored by private institutions, and given a home in Birmingham, thanks to the generosity of the city council, which has been funding it to the tune of about £250,000 a year, although that grant is decreasing. The Arts Council has argued over the years that it cannot make an award to Gilbert and Sullivan's D'Oyly Carte largely because the Government have reduced its Treasury grant. In effect, whatever it is funding at the moment has to stay, but nothing new can be taken on board. That means that the existing orchestras and other good work must receive preferential treatment, but nothing new can be considered.

I wonder whether that is a correct analysis. I wonder whether the Arts Council is taking the right approach. Whether it is or not, there is a solution to the problem: lottery funds. The Arts Council receives £325 million a year from the national lottery. Many of the people who buy lottery tickets enjoy Gilbert and Sullivan. Can we find £500,000 from that £325 million to keep the D'Oyly Carte and Gilbert and Sullivan going? The answer is uncertain—the bureaucracy, rules and regulations surrounding the giving of lottery money are so complex that it has been difficult to see how money can be given to the D'Oyly Carte to keep it going, or to anyone else.

One would be forgiven for thinking that it should be otherwise. One may wonder why 0.5 per cent. of the total of the Arts Council grant from the lottery cannot be given

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to the D'Oyly Carte. I have been told the reason by the chairman of the Arts Council. Whereas the Arts Council's funds are governed by Treasury rules, lottery awards are covered by different rules that come under the lottery regulations. Rules and regulations seem to be the problem in this case. The plot, which is worthy of Gilbert and Sullivan—perhaps mixed with Whitehall farce—is steeped in bureaucracy. The dramatis personae, which in this case includes Lord Gowrie and the Secretary of State for National Heritage, is peppered with petty bureaucrats proffering little lists that contain certain items. If a company is involved with quartets, madrigals or grand opera, it is on the list, but if a company is involved with low-brow Gilbert and Sullivan, it does not appear on the list. The list excludes popular culture and touring operettas.

We must give encouragement to the Secretary of State for National Heritage and her officials to achieve a little less restrictive regime on lottery funds. To give the Secretary of State her due, she has encouraged the setting up of a stabilisation fund, established to help organisations pay off any outstanding debt and put themselves on to a sound financial footing—we are all for that. I think that it is a splendid initiative, but the trouble is that it is surrounded by more red tape, with more criteria and more rules and regulations. It may take so long before the stabilisation fund comes on tap that the D'Oyly Carte will not be around to benefit.

The officials are also trying to free the lottery money so that some funds can be given to on-going touring operations. At present, the lottery money is precluded from paying for touring operettas or touring companies. To give credit where credit is due, the Secretary of State is trying to release lottery money for things other than buildings. If the D'Oyly Carte had applied for a new theatre to be built, there would be no problem. The problem would involve finding the money to do anything in that theatre.

The Leader of the House should find a way of not allowing the House to adjourn today until we have saved one of the most peculiar and important of our British institutions: the D'Oyly Carte and its Gilbert and Sullivan repertoire.

11.47 am

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) referred to the importance of Gilbert and Sullivan in this country's cultural heritage and I want to speak about something that is important to its natural heritage.

The House may be aware that I have long been interested in hedgerows, the landscape and British wildlife. Hedgerows are important, but unfortunately, over the past 30 or 40 years, we have seen the destruction of thousands of miles of hedgerow. In the 1970s and during the passage of the Wildlife and Countryside Bill in 1981, I sought to gain protection for hedgerows, but the Government blocked the move. In 1982, with all-party support, I presented a Bill to protect the most important hedgerows in England, but the Government blocked it. Further attempts followed and in 1987, the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher, who was guest speaker at the centenary celebrations of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, called for the protection of hedgerows. I was delighted with that call because, as a member of the council of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, I was to present a Bill in the House that very afternoon to accomplish just that provision.

Unfortunately, on the following Friday, despite the fact that the Bill was supported by Conservative Members as well as by Opposition Members, the Government blocked it, on the instructions of the then Prime Minister, who had called for such protection only a few days before.

Early in 1982, I reawakened interest in the old enclosure hedgerows—or the parliamentary hedgerows, as they are called in some parts of the country—and told the House that such hedgerows seemed to be legally protected. The Minister told me, "Those old laws no longer apply; but they have never been repealed." I made representations to the Minister and inquired of him, "You do realise that you're paying out grants to people to grub hedgerows that may be protected in law?"

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food then moved with enormous speed, ending all grants for grubbing out hedgerows. Trying to put matters right, the Ministry then introduced grants to plant new hedgerows. I welcome that measure, but point out the fact that it may take those new hedgerows a couple of centuries to develop the ecological interest possessed by those that have been grubbed out.

The Government failed to act to protect hedgerows. Furthermore, unfortunately, conservation organisations did not pursue the test case that I had thought desirable. Subsequently, the Government continued to block initiatives by Back Benchers on both sides of the House to protect hedgerows.

In the Environment Act 1995, the Government gave themselves the power to take action to protect hedgerows. Although they have received credit for assuming that power, they have, so far, not earned it by doing anything to implement their power.

About an hour ago, I left the House to make a telephone call, in which I learned that we now have the beginnings of a test case and that we have received a judgment stating that individuals who are concerned about the destruction of hedgerows of parliamentary character—the old enclosure hedgerows—have locus standi. The case was initiated by Mr. Colin Seymour, who has a great deal of experience in this matter, and I have supported it, as has the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, of which I am patron. We have now flushed the matter out into the open.

A few months ago, the Government refused to make a declaratory statement on the matter to confirm the legal position, as they should have done. They will now have to do so, or face a flood of cases across the country.

The House should understand that no one involved in this issue is being Luddite about it. The common land of England was enclosed in the industrial revolution to enable the production of more food for an increasing population. However, when the common lands were enclosed in 4,000 parishes—with each enclosure before 1840 requiring a separate piece of legislation—the landowners who carved up the land between themselves were given not only ownership but an on-going legal responsibility to protect hedgerows for all time. That responsibility applied to them, their heirs and their assignees, and those laws have never been repealed.

The Government's actions have allowed the irresponsible to maintain ownership of that land, and to get rid of the responsibilities and obligations that the ownership entails. The Government cannot continue to ignore that fact.

I had hoped that this would be my last speech in the House—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] No; the Government should go, and they should go quickly. If there is an early election, this will be my last speech in the House. However, if we do not have an early election—in which case I shall have to make another speech—I hope not only that sensible hedgerow protection is introduced under the 1995 Act, but that the Government will start to act responsibly on the obligations and responsibilities placed on landowners by the 4,000 private Acts of enclosure passed by the House before 1840.

11.53 am

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) will be pleased to know that my wife and I have been busy planting hedges all round our land in Scotland, as some of us do care about hedges.

I believe that the House should consider the constitution of the United Kingdom. In particular, I believe that we should have a debate about the crazy, unworkable and dangerous proposals for devolving power to a Parliament in Scotland. The House should also consider viable and deliverable alternative proposals.

Hon. Members are aware of the Liberal Democrats' proposals for a federal structure, in which Scotland would have a Parliament in Edinburgh, the English regions would have regional Parliaments and Wales and Northern Ireland would have their Parliaments. That is theoretically possible, but, unfortunately for the Liberal Democrats and for others who support a federal structure, the 83 per cent. of the UK population who live in England have, thus far, shown no real interest in such proposals.

In a democracy, there is no viable way in which the minority of the population who live in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can force the vast majority of the population, who live in England, to accept a federal structure against their wishes. Consequently, any proposals for constitutional change must seem viable and be acceptable to the majority of the UK population.

Labour's proposals—which have created great rifts within the party and opposition to the proposals from outside the party—are neither viable nor acceptable. That is why the House should debate the constitution, and, in particular, the relationship between Scotland and England.

I believe that Labour's proposals are dangerous and unworkable. They are also unsaleable in England, because the English voter's right to enjoy the same decision-making structure as Scotland has been ignored totally. Does anyone seriously believe that voters in England—who comprise 83 per cent. of the UK population—will accept Labour's devolution proposals?

In simple language: what devolution proposals does Labour expect 83 per cent. of the population to support at the next general election? It expects English voters to agree to a Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who is a Scot, educated at a fee-paying Scottish selective school, and who is proposing to lead a Government at Westminster. Most of the major portfolios in his Administration are likely to be filled by Scots from Scottish constituencies. The right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) is expected to be Chancellor of the Exchequer; the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) is expected to be Foreign Secretary; the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) is expected to be Secretary of State for Scotland; the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) is expected to be the Patronage Secretary and Chief Whip; and the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) may turn out to be the Secretary of State for Transport. Furthermore, the Law Officers and many of the Ministers of State will be Scots from Scottish constituencies.

If that were to happen, English voters would say, with considerable justification, that the Labour Scots are expecting to run Westminster—which would be perfectly legitimate in a unitary Parliament. However, those same voters will find that proposal unfair and unacceptable if that proposed Scottish-run Government also ask them to support proposals for a Scottish Parliament to be run by Scots in Edinburgh.

What about Labour's proposals for a referendum? In my judgment, it is nonsense to pretend that there is any logic in having a referendum on constitutional change without spelling out exactly what the referendum will contain. The details of a referendum are not merely to deal with constitutional anomalies but will be critical in determining how people will vote. The only time to hold a referendum on constitutional change is after Parliament has fully debated the matter and voted a Bill through both Houses—only then will the details be known and only then should the question be put to the people. It is nonsense to pretend otherwise—just a fig leaf to cover Labour's embarrassment.

I believe that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield knows that the package that Labour is proposing is unsustainable and that he understands that it is unsaleable in England. That is one of the reasons for the Opposition's U-turn. As I have outlined, Labour's latest proposal for a two-part referendum is also unsaleable.

English-based voters will not accept that only Scottish-based voters should be allowed to vote for proposals that would allow the Scots to run Westminster, with Scottish Members voting on English law and order, education, local government and other politically sensitive English matters, while English Members would have no say on such matters affecting Scotland. The West Lothian question cannot be ignored. It has to be answered, but there is no answer yet.

To add to the irritation, Labour expects to retain the Goschen/Barnett formula which takes into account sparsity and population numbers in Scotland so that anything up to £1.40 of UK taxpayers' funds can be spent per head of the population in Scotland for every £1 per head spent in England—and the Scots are going to be running Westminster.

Such a notion is unsaleable in England because any party with a majority of Scottish Members could, if it so wished, take all Scottish legislation, including controversial measures, through all its stages in the Scottish Grand Committee. That is the obvious, viable, deliverable and workable alternative. As has recently been shown, thanks to the work of my right hon. Friend the

[Mr. Bill Walker]

Secretary of State for Scotland, the Scottish Grand Committee can sit anywhere in Scotland and, with minor changes to the rules, can have UK Ministers attending and participating in debates.

So why is there deemed to be a need to set up a Parliament at great cost—£47 million, I understand—in Edinburgh? That £47 million would be only the beginning and the continuing revenue costs of this unnecessary, constitutionally dangerous Parliament could run into many hundreds of millions of pounds. Why, then, is the Labour party proposing such a badly thought-out scheme and putting the UK constitution at risk? It is doing so for short-term political advantage at Westminster and in Scotland.

No attempt has been made to accommodate the need to reassess the number of Scottish Members of Parliament; nor has any attempt been made to consider the amount of taxpayers' money spent in Scotland. The only way to prevent a damaging and debilitating English backlash is to make all the electors throughout the UK aware of the real hazards of the scheme. The crazy and dangerous proposals should be scrapped. We need a full debate to expose the realities.

I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) here. I believe that the answer to the Northern Ireland situation, which is often brought up as the red herring, lies in giving people there the same structures as the United Kingdom—local government with all the powers and authority that it has in the rest of the United Kingdom. For example, it could be in the form of a regional council. With a unitary Parliament, we cannot have one part of the United Kingdom enjoying benefits that other parts do not. That is neither viable nor deliverable.

The 83 per cent. of the UK population living in England must be made aware of the realities of Labour's crazy scheme. Were it ever implemented, not only would the Scots under Labour be seen to be having their cake and eating it, but the English voters would be expected to bake the cake, ice and deliver the cake and pay for it.

We should be aware of the hazards and recognise that there would be an English backlash. I am not suggesting that the backlash will come only from Conservative Members. The British people as a whole have a gut feeling about what is right and wrong—they would know that Labour's proposals are wrong and would not accept them.

12.4 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): This has been an interesting debate. I should like to comment on many issues, but because time is limited, I shall concentrate on a constituency matter, namely a company called LORE, or Land Owners Rights to Enforcement which is involved in wheel clamping on private land.

Wheel clamping is a cause of great concern in my constituency and throughout the Wakefield area. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, people are being allowed to park their cars only to find that, as soon as they leave them, the cars are clamped. LORE is demanding £95, or £100 in one instance, to have the clamp removed. That is extortion and something will have to be done to control such companies which are not registered and which recruit all kinds of people to carry out their work and extort money from unfortunate people.

I had hoped that the matter would be cleared up by the Home Secretary before the recess. I understand that he is aware of the situation and is on record as having promised to consider regularising the way in which wheel clampers operate.

In my constituency on Saturday—market day—three cars were clamped. The municipal car park borders on to the car park of a public house. One car owner had purchased a ticket from the municipal machine because he thought that he had parked in the area run by the local authority. The person involved—a Mr. Robinson—had his car clamped and received a demand for £95 to have it removed. A group of 50 people gathered round to support the claim that those whose cars had been clamped should have the clamps removed free of charge. The police were called because the situation could have become serious. I know that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are aware of the problem which has affected your constituents.

In a further case, Mrs. Mountain who lives in my constituency went to buy a ticket only to find that her car had been clamped when she returned to it. The people who carry out such operations are often large and heavy and are frightening in themselves. Something needs to be done because the situation becomes serious when people say that they will not allow clampers to get away with it.

Indeed, a constituent of yours, Mr. Deputy Speaker, took the initiative only last week. Her car was clamped but instead of waiting for the clamping company to tow it away, she towed it away using her own tow vehicle, had the clamp removed and demanded £95 from the clamping company for the clamp's return. I regard that as true initiative but it is dangerous because the heavies—the people employed by LORE—demanded the lady's home address and telephone number, which she refused to give. She regarded that as intimidation.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) spoke about intimidation and extortion in Northern Ireland. It is being used by wheel clamping companies in our local communities. I hoped that we could have found a solution or at least asked the Home Secretary do something about this dirty business before the House goes into recess. Sadly, that will not happen, but hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that something must be done about companies that are not registered.

Wheel clamping companies should be registered with the local authority and there should be reasonable charges. I am not suggesting that there should be no charge, but £95 is totally unreasonable. If a car is towed away, a further charge of £25 per day is imposed. The House must address that issue and find a solution.

12.10 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): We have had a useful debate with a high level of interest on both sides of the House. Therefore, there has been a great demand on time and some hon. Members who are present have not been able to speak. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North–East (Mr. Timms) was particularly disappointed that he was unable to discuss the catastrophic £32.5 million deficit faced by his local health authority.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is well known that I am the only

hon. Member who speaks for an entire county and represents more than 100,000 constituents. It is also well known, as it has been in the media, that I represent the only seat in the House where there has been a serious call for devolution and independence from the United Kingdom constitution. It is a matter of the utmost regret that the House has not found time to allow me to debate that issue today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): That may be so, but it is not a point of order for the Chair. The hon. Gentleman has made his point.

Mrs. Taylor: Notwithstanding that, we have had a useful debate and many hon. Members have raised important issues.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) opened the debate and it was no surprise to the House that once again he raised his long-term concern with the difficulties facing disabled people. I hope that the House continues to focus on those issues when my right hon. Friend retires. He has served the House well by drawing those matters to our attention on numerous occasions.

Other hon. Members also mentioned long-term problems, including those in their constituencies. The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) mentioned Bart's and the health service in London. My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) mentioned hedgerows and the hon. Member for South–West Bedfordshire (Sir D. Madel) mentioned the Child Support Agency, which is becoming a long-term problem. Despite all the assurances that matters are improving, most hon. Members know from their case work that many problems remain in respect of the CSA. I was glad that the hon. Gentleman mentioned some of them today.

Other hon. Members have raised topical issues. My hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) spoke about wheel clamping. He gained the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House when he described the outrages that are well known to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in your constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) spoke about issues that he has raised previously. I am thinking particularly about what he said about airport safety. As he said, had the lessons of Lockerbie been learnt, perhaps the events of the past few weeks might have been different.

The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) asked the Leader of the House for a constitutional debate, if not during Prorogation, early next Session. He gave the Government an extremely mature warning about the misuse of backwoodsmen in another place. The hon. Gentleman referred to the Asylum and Immigration Bill. The vote in another place on the amendment that concerned him would have been very different had it been a vote of life peers and not hereditary peers. The same applies to the decision affecting Ministry of Defence housing. He was right to caution the Government against playing into the hands of those who want to reform the House of Lords. Every time the Government get their way by dragging in every hereditary peer who is entitled to vote, the result is often different from the will of the life peers and that does not serve the Government well. I commend him for making that warning.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I referred not just to life peers, but to hereditary peers who regularly attend the House of Lords.

Mrs. Taylor: On both occasions, the attendance was much greater than usual.

Perhaps the most topical issue this morning was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), who mentioned the Premier club and the role of Mr. John Beckwith. It is urgent and important that before the House rises there should be a statement on the role of Mr. Beckwith in the sale of Ministry of Defence housing and the possible sale of social security property—an initiative that seems to have come from Mr. Beckwith himself. The value of the properties is reported to be £2.5 billion. Therefore, there are massive implications for the taxpayer and for the reputation of politicians.

We know from the Sunday newspapers that Mr. Beckwith is also chairman of the Premier club, which solicits donations to Tory party funds of up to £100,000 from very rich business men in return for contact with Ministers up to and including the Prime Minister—hence the title Premier club. At the same time, Mr. Beckwith is having discussions with management advisers to the Secretary of State for Social Security and the Secretary of State for Defence and urging the sale of all that property to consortia which he leads. That puts Ministers in an intolerable position as there is a conflict of interests. It also raises some important issues that should be addressed before the House adjourns for the summer recess. It demonstrates how much wiser it would have been to refer the issue of party political funding to the Nolan committee as soon as possible rather than delaying until after the next election.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) raised another topical issue that concerns both sides of the House. He was concerned about defence procurement. There is real concern that has been mentioned almost on a daily basis over the past two weeks that the Government have not yet announced their decisions on three vital contracts—the hon. Gentleman mentioned one of them. Hundreds of thousands of jobs are in jeopardy and there is great uncertainty within the armed forces. Ministers previously gave the impression that announcements would be made before the summer recess, but it now appears that the Chancellor is blocking decisions or announcements on those contracts.

I raised the matter at business questions, as did Conservative Members, yet we have not had a decision. There is great concern that the decision will be made without hon. Members having the opportunity to question Ministers. It would be unfortunate were such a decision to be made immediately the House goes into recess. Several hon. Members on both sides of the House raised that important point. Indeed, Conservative Members, as much as Labour Members, have said in this debate that several decisions are imminent—whether they be on the funding of London hospitals, defence procurement, or the Stone of Scone, to which the hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) referred. We have been told that decisions are imminent but that they will not be announced in the House. I do not think that that is satisfactory.

[Mrs. Taylor]

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East speculated on what it will be like when the House returns in October and said that we shall have a very sparse Queen's Speech that might be no more than an outline of the Conservative party's manifesto. I am not sure whether we shall return for more than a formal Prorogation in the autumn because I would not be surprised if, effectively, today were the last day of this Parliament before the election. I certainly hope that that is so. I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House would consider it beneficial to everyone if a phoney Session did not begin in October.

12.20 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): It will not surprise the House to learn that I do not intend to be tempted too far by the remarks by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor). I assure her that the Queen's Speech will not be phoney. I have spent a great deal of time on it. It will be a good, solid Queen's Speech, containing measures that we intend to carry through for the benefit of the people of this country.

The remarks by the hon. Member for Dewsbury represent only one of the temptations with which I am faced at the end of this debate, which has been the most extensive of its kind that we have yet had. If I count the point of order from my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) as something akin to a speech and include my speech, we will have reached an historic high of 20 hon. Members taking part in this debate. That leads me to the first of various temptations. I wonder—it is very dangerous to do so in the presence of my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, and certainly totally against my own interests—whether the opportunity provided by this debate would not be rather a good use of a number of Wednesday mornings. Although it is perhaps not appropriate to consider that now, it has been observable that we have had a very good debate and hon. Members have valued the opportunity to raise a variety of issues.

Were there not a risk of my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) thinking that I might be flippant, which is the last thing that I would wish to be on the subject that he raised, I would be tempted to say that no stone has been left unturned in this debate. Certainly no hedgerow was left unexplored in what we all fervently hope will not be the last speech by the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy).

I see that the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) is not present. I personally thought that his speech was rather outside the normal tone and terms of this debate. A large part of his speech rested on the proposition that this place was dead, yet it has seemed very much alive this morning, which, in a sense, disproves what he said at the outset. His pretty extraordinary speech, on which the hon. Member for Dewsbury sought to build and which was effectively demolished by my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton, was apparently based on attacking my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for taking a position with which the hon. Gentleman declared that he agreed. I do not understand quite what he thought that he was at. He also succeeded, as did one or two others, in referring to devolution in the presence of the author of the West Lothian question without seeking to address it in any way, shape or form.

Leaving aside such points, I am faced this morning with an even more impossible task than usual because I have been invited to range across the entire future of the British constitution by my hon. Friends the Members for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) and for North Tayside (Mr. Walker). When I put together the remarks by the hon. Members for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and for Tooting (Mr. Cox) and one or two others, I realise that I have also been invited to range virtually across the entire British foreign policy—all in less than 10 minutes.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow knows very well that the Government have very strong objections to the United States' extra-territorial legislation, which is one of the things to which he referred. I assure him that, although we share the United States' desire to promote political and economic reform in Cuba, we differ fundamentally on the means by which to achieve it. I cannot comment on all the points that he made, but I shall of course ensure that his particular point on airport security is drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

The hon. Member for Tooting is an indefatigable contributor to our debates because of his experience in many parts of the world. I cannot range over the whole situation in Cyprus, but I am grateful to him for recognising that Sir David Hannay's appointment as our special representative is a sign of our determination to help reinvigorate the settlement process.

I briefly touched on the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Romford, but I should also say that he knows that consultation is going on about the future location of the stone. I am quite sure that his remarks will be taken carefully into account in the course of that consultation.

Since the issues that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) raised have by and large been the subject of extensive discussion and correspondence in various ways, he will not be surprised to learn that I am not in a position to add to what has been said on earlier occasions about the Bill to which he referred or, the unhappy—indeed, tragic—problem of haemophiliacs.

On the legal case concerning Gloucestershire county council, the Government are considering the judgment and its implications. Leave to appeal to the House of Lords has been granted and the Department of Health will consider whether to revise any of its guidance—which was of course the right hon. Gentleman's request—in the light of the House of Lords judgment. In any case, we shall shortly be discussing the details of the case with the local authority associations.

My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) asked a specific question. I have an answer in front of me and I shall simply read it. Whether he regards it as an answer is a matter for him to judge, but we can no doubt return to it if he does not. It says that, in line with the investment appraisal process used throughout all NHS trusts, the final costs of the project to which he referred will not be known until the full business case has been produced. That will take into account the details of bids received from potential private sector partners in September and continuing discussions with the purchasing authority.

However, the trust is confident that the costs will be in line with those in the outline business case. That is certainly a relevant comment that my right hon. Friend will want to consider very carefully.

A number of references have been made to defence procurement. Although I cannot add to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said when questioned about the matter yesterday, I assure the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) in particular that I will ensure that the concerns and interest that he expressed on that front, together with the comments that he made on others, are drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and other right hon. Friends as appropriate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) raised a constituency case, and I well understand that. He had kindly given me notice of it. I must repeat that, as all hon. Members know, it is not possible for Ministers to intervene in judges' decisions. In view of what he said, however, I shall specifically ask for his speech to be drawn to the attention of my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor.

I shall ensure that the remarks by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) are carefully studied. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has asked the National Radiological Protection Board to undertake an independent inquiry into the contamination levels in the area to which the hon. Gentleman referred. It might also be possible for the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment, which has a wide-ranging brief, to take account of any new information that arises concerning the position in his constituency.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for South–West Bedfordshire (Sir D. Madel) recognises that it is no more possible for me to range across the entire education policy than it is for me to do so on foreign policy and the constitution. I have, however, noted with care his remarks, which I thought were interesting on that front as well as on industrial relations.

I thought that the usual knockabout by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was quite good this morning. As ever when he gets to constituency matters, he made some important points, but I am not in a position to comment on them in detail. I am sorry that my success in getting him a letter from my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has not satisfied his appetite. His appetite for a meeting remains and I shall ensure that the matter is drawn to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend.

As for the IIAC recommendations, with which, as the hon. Gentleman well knows, I am familiar, he slightly exaggerated the amount of time the Government have had to consider the proposals. As I understand it, the report was given to Ministers in March and published in May. These are complicated matters; a response will be made once all the issues raised have been given full and careful examination.

Lastly—I am doing rather well having referred already to hedgerows—I note the strong support for the D'Oyly Carte expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen). I know that the company is in the middle of complex commercial negotiations on its future, and I do not intend to comment further.

As for hedgerows, section 97 of the Environment Act 1995 requires that regulations be subject to consultation and approval by both Houses before they can come into effect. We expect to publish draft regulations for consultation later this summer, with the aim of laying the regulations before Parliament by the end of the year.

Apart from wheelclamping, which I shall bring to the attention of the Home Secretary as he is familiar with the problem, I believe that I have now touched on every subject raised this morning.

Social Policy (Europe)

12.30 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): I welcome my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) to the Front Bench today. This is the first time he will have had the pleasure of engaging in debate with me, so my welcome for him is even greater than it might have been for any other Minister who might have attempted to yawn his way through the debate. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will not do that.

I make no apology for raising this subject again, the fifth time I have done so in the House since 1992. I promise my right hon. Friend that, if he accepts all my recommendations, I will never speak on this subject again. I suspect that that is a promise neither of us will be able to keep.

Our greatest problem in relation to European social policy has been our failure fully to understand how the treaty of Rome and its amendments work and have worked, and how the institutions of Europe have implemented the treaties. I refer to the Commission, the court and the Council of Ministers.

We have endlessly been told not to worry too much about the wording of the treaties; that they are vague, that they can be interpreted as we like, and that, after all, it is the nation states that will drive forward implementation of the treaties, so all will be well. In short, we are told that the vagueness of the wording will constitute our defence. I, on the other hand, have endlessly repeated that the language of the treaties, beginning with the preambles—even though they are officially ultra vires—is very important, because it allows the court to understand the precise direction in which the treaties lead.

Comments made by Advocates General and justices of the European Court have shown time and again how they see the vague treaty obligations being implemented. The problem of the 48-hour working week is a clear practical example of what I mean.

I should like to start by reading out some of these preambles. In wonderfully general language, one of them states:

"The Community shall have as its task . . . a high level of employment and of social protection, the raising of the standard of living and quality of life, and economic and social cohesion and solidarity among Member States."

Article 3 further states that

"a policy in the social sphere comprising a European Social Fund"

shall be pursued, and that

"the strengthening of economic and social cohesion"

shall be the guiding principle.

It is important to understand that the justices believe that such language gives them a sense of Europe's direction, which is eventually to act as one on such matters.

Too often, I believe, my right hon. and hon. Friends fail to understand the language in which these documents are couched. Articles 117 to 122 all concern social policy and are written in wonderfully general language. For instance, article 117 says:

"Such a development will ensue not only from the functioning of the common market, which will favour the harmonisation of social systems, but also from the procedures provided for in this Treaty and from the approximation of provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action".

Article 118 states:

"the Commission shall have the task of promoting close co-operation between Member States in the social field, particularly in matters relating to: employment; labour law and working conditions; basic and advanced vocational training; social security; prevention of occupational accidents and diseases; occupational hygiene; the right of association and collective bargaining between employers and workers".

Article 118a, which comes under qualified majority voting, is relevant, because, in the titanium dioxide case, the court has decided that such matters will be decided not by unanimity among the member states but by QMV. That is of course relevant to the 48-hour working week. It reads:

"Member States shall pay particular attention to encouraging improvements, especially in the working environment, as regards the health and safety of workers, and shall set as their objective the harmonisation of conditions in this area".

I do not intend to read out all the articles, but I do suggest that my hon. Friends read, re-read and re-re-read them.

Especially I would ask my hon. Friends to read article 5, which stipulates that member states

"shall abstain from any measure which could jeopardise the attainment of the objectives of this Treaty."

That is critical, because our social chapter opt-out is in Europe's sights.

The Minister's predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), assured me at the time of Maastricht that the court would not be a problem: that it was in the business of decentralising, and would rule in favour of nation states. Since then, there have been judgments against us on the transfer of undertakings and on fishing. Most recently, the Advocate General made his remarks about the 48-hour working week.

I was told after a previous speech that I was attacking the court. That is not my intention. It is only carrying out what it has always done—it sees itself as the architect of political union, just as it always has since 1954. Indeed, Judge David Edward told a Committee of the House exactly that. It is therefore quite wrong to think that I am attacking the court. What I am attacking is our failure to understand what we have signed up to. While we are contemplating the implementation of the social policy opt-out, Europe is already planning how the social chapter will work.

Back in 1960, Advocate General Roemer said:

"The European treaties are nothing but a partial implementation of a grand general programme, dominated by the idea of a complete integration of the European States".

Lasok and Bridge, authors of one of the premier reference works on the subject, have this to say:

"references to the spirit or the aims of the Treaties enable the Court to fill in the gaps in the system and so to 'update' the text. In doing so the Court has consciously acted not only as the Constitutional Court of the Community but also as an architect of European integration".

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Labour Members—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they?"] None of them is here, and nor are the Liberals. Still, both parties make great play of the fact that, if they ever came to government, jointly or on their own, they would increase expenditure on a new range of social benefits. As I understand my hon. Friend's argument, however, what they say does not matter at all. This whole policy area has

been taken over by Europe, which will decide how much we spend on it. So what the Labour and Liberal parties think is wholly irrelevant.

Mr. Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. I am told that, if Labour gains power—God help us if it does—it will think the unthinkable, but I urge him not to think the unthinkable—that Labour will get into power. The resistance that the Government have put up has slowed the process, although it will not stop it. Labour will simply help to accelerate the process by acquiescing to everything laid down by Europe.

The latest and most important example of the process in action is the working time directive, of which my right hon. Friend the Minister will be only too well aware. Although limitations were set in the Council on the way the directive works, it will cost in practice up to £2 billion to implement, with a further £1 billion needed in the following two years.

The costs to industry will be severe and will be borne across the economy in lost employment, as the flexibility to employ under the previous conditions changes. The directive also breaks the historical way in which successive British Governments—ironically, even socialist Governments—have accepted the more laissez-faire and relaxed view on the way in which employers and employees negotiate contracts in this country.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): May I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate? If I may say so, he is an entirely worthy successor to his honourable predecessor, the noble Lord Tebbit. I wish to give an example of the effect that the social chapter and the 48-hour week will have in my constituency.

Cleveland Potash—based near Whitby in the northern end of my constituency—is by far the biggest employer in the area. I was told last week that, if the 48-hour week is imposed, the company will have to lay men off. It is the only potash mine in this country, and competes with mines in South America. The fact is that one works when the work is there, not when the Commission says so.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I totally agree with my hon. Friend, who has practical experience in these matters—something that too few hon. Members have. He has run a business, employed people, and, no doubt, laid people off at times.

If the working time directive is so successful, Spain—which has implemented all the measures—should be rocketing away in trade, and should have no unemployment. Everything in Spain should work according to what Labour believes and the proposal allows. Instead, Spain has more than 23 per cent. unemployment, more than 30 per cent. youth unemployment and a stagnating economy.

The idea that this country would put up with those problems and not have constant turmoil on the streets is unbelievable. This country, which has implemented none of the measures, has the lowest, and still declining, level of unemployment in Europe, and an enterprise economy on which we pride ourselves.

Mr. Steen: The interesting thing about Spain is that it gets £8 million a day from the EU, but, in spite of all that public subsidy, it does not succeed.

Mr. Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend makes yet another powerful point. The same applies to Germany, which has rising unemployment, and France. Having taken hard decisions—from changing the nature of pension rights to deregulating and making the work force more flexible—the Government are seeing those successes bear fruit. It would be a tragedy if we allowed that to change by implementing the directive.

Although there are practical reasons why implementation would be a disaster, there is also a principle involved. If we allow this matter to go through, and if we do not make it clear to the Commission and to our colleagues in Europe that we will not accept it and that we are prepared to do almost anything to stop it, a flood of further regulation will follow the directive. That regulation would restrict the flexibility of the British work force, and would bring it into line with the sclerotic and declining state of employment in Europe. That is why, for once, the principle is critical. Even though it is said that the situation is not as bad as some make out, the principle makes it devastating.

My right hon. Friend the Minister must demonstrate that he will resist implementation at all costs, because behind it lie increased holiday rights for fathers, increased regulations on employers on sex discrimination, more stifling controls on part-time workers, workers' privacy regulations, and restrictions on an employer's ability to dismiss employees. It goes on—the catalogue is endless.

Another matter of social policy which may even affect the would-be move to a single currency is the issue of pensions. We have made our pensions provision flexible by putting it out into the private sector. Funds have been provided, and people now have security for the future in a way that they never did before. In Europe, none of that is happening. I understand that an estimated £10 trillion-worth of liability exists across Europe, and that would be imported to this country were we to go down the road of a single currency. The process of social policy is about moving us to the lowest common denominator that exists across Europe.

We must make it clear that there is no point in putting a line in the sand and having an opt-out, if we accept that that opt-out can be bypassed by treaty obligations. We must make it clear that we will not only resist implementation but will absolutely refuse to allow it to happen. We must also seek a different relationship with Europe.

It is inconceivable that a Conservative Government could allow social provisions as contained in the articles of the treaty to dictate to us on the flexibility of our work force, which has better employment provisions than elsewhere. Now is the time for us to debate a different relationship, which would allow Britain to be the enterprise centre of Europe and the flexible trading partner with the rest of the world that we have always prided ourselves on being.

12.46 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I shall be extremely brief. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) on securing

[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]

the debate. Some of us have been accused over the years of heinous and dastardly crimes against our country, our Government and our party, but he is saying in substance nothing new—we expressed these opinions in this place during the debates on the Maastricht treaty.

My hon. Friend will recall that we assembled some comments taken from debates on the treaty in a pamphlet that we called "Game, Set and Match?" In a debate on 20 January 1993, he said:

"Therefore, the route that I have demonstrated leaves the door open for substantial Community interference in social policy, effectively undermining our exclusion from the social chapter."

In the same debate, I said:

"Even though we may wish to opt out of the 48-hour working week directive . . . it is impossible to imagine a situation in which, 11 member states having voted for a particular directive, the court will not rule against us if we continue to defy that directive."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1993; Vol. 217, c. 413-22.]

It is clear that we are not saying anything new, and what we said was not startling then—everyone else in Europe was saying pretty much the same thing.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister on a tiny ray of hope in "A Partnership of Nations", the Government's White Paper on European policy, in which paragraph 20 states:

"The Government is considering ideas for limiting the scope of Community action".

That may not have been enough for my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory)—who made it clear that he did not believe that our European policy is working—but that is what we must pin our hopes upon if we are to stop European social policy wrecking our economy.

12.48 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I am honoured to be replying to the debate that my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) has had the good fortune to secure. I am grateful for his welcome.

The Government's position on European social policy is already well known to the House. Since the Maastricht negotiations in 1991, the UK has been in a unique position in Europe. We and our European partners have taken separate paths as far as increasing the burden on businesses of social legislation is concerned. I think my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford will agree that the path taken by the UK is the better one.

I need only cite as evidence the decisions by LG and Siemens to locate major new manufacturing facilities in the UK to demonstrate that our policy is working. We are by far the most attractive destination for overseas investment in Europe. A significant factor in those investment decisions is our social opt-out. Though we participate to the full in the single market, we have chosen not to be bound by commitments taken on by our partners under the agreement of the Fourteen on social policy.

There is some confusion about what our opt-out means. It is not correct that we are not bound by any elements of European social policy. The European Union treaty has always contained several provisions relating to social policy, such as health and safety and equal treatment: we are bound by them, and we honour them in full. In fact, the UK has a much better record than most member states on that.

However, we are not bound by any agreements concluded by the Fourteen under the Maastricht social agreement, such as the European works councils directives. Some sections of the press have trumpeted the fact that, in spite of that, some British multinational companies have decided to adopt works councils. The crucial point is that those companies had the freedom to choose, and made their decisions voluntarily. It is vital for businesses that they, not Government, make such decisions.

Another example is the directive on parental leave, to which my hon. Friend referred, which was also recently agreed by the Fourteen. British companies are, of course, free to provide generous benefits for employees after the birth of their children, but we will not force them to incur high costs, regardless of their ability to meet them, by relinquishing our social opt-out. The most likely result would be not higher social standards but higher unemployment.

The UK's flexible and deregulated labour market encourages employment and growth. We want it to continue to do so. Had the UK signed up to the social chapter, legislation on working conditions could have been imposed on us by qualified majority, whatever the views of the British Government, employers and workers. That is why the Government will not sign up to the terms of the Maastricht social chapter. We certainly could not sign up to the social chapter and then control it.

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan) *rose—*

Mr. Hanley: I am sorry, but I do not have long. If I have time, I will come back to my hon. Friend.

We could not pick and choose the bits of the social chapter that suit us. The moment we signed up, the scale of legislation would undoubtedly increase, and Britain would be overruled on many matters vital to our economy.

What do we believe to be the European Community's legitimate role in social policy? It is certainly not the case that we see no role for the European Community at all in employment or social matters. There is vital work that the Community can do, but its social policy and employment agenda must be founded on three important principles.

The first is competitiveness. Significant and sustainable growth is impossible in an uncompetitive economy. If Community businesses are not able to maintain and improve their competitiveness, jobs will not be created in the Community but be increasingly located outside it. Europe will not be able to compete in the global marketplace. Many provisions of the agreement of the Fourteen on social policy will lead directly to a loss of competitiveness. Many British and foreign businesses also believe that.

Secondly, we insist on diversity. That is, or should be, one of the Community's greatest strengths. The diversity of our institutions, traditions and legislation is as great in employment and the labour market as in almost any other sphere, and it must be respected. No one can believe that the measures necessary to combat unemployment in Greece or Spain are the same as those required in Britain. Are the problems of regulating working practices the

same in Sweden as they are in Portugal? I think not. Unnecessary harmonisation risks raising costs and damaging competitiveness.

The third essential is subsidiarity. European social policy must respect the division of legal competence between the Community and member states that is laid down in the treaties, and the principle of subsidiarity that is now enshrined in them. Much of the action required to combat unemployment must be, and often can only be, undertaken by member states themselves. The Community's role is to support and complement action by them, not to try to supplant that action altogether or to tell them what action they must take.

When the treaty on European Union was concluded, the UK succeeded in including the principle of subsidiarity in its text. In the current intergovernmental conference to consider treaty changes, the UK will make proposals to entrench subsidiarity still further.

We are also committed to doing everything in our power to convince our European partners of the dangers of creating a two-tier labour market: one tier of people with permanent jobs, well paid and with all the benefits of pension rights, holiday pay, and employment protection legislation; and a second tier either with no job, or forced into temporary contracts—or even the black economy—because employers are deterred by excessive regulation from offering permanent jobs. We are bound by a simple moral principle: it is wrong to favour those in jobs at the expense of those without them, or to concentrate on protecting the employment of the first tier while failing to increase the employability of the second.

It is clear that adding yet more employment law or social legislation will do nothing to help the people of Britain, or those of the rest of Europe.

Mr. Sweeney: Conservative Members fully endorse all that my right hon. Friend has said, but what will the Government do to renegotiate our obligations under the various treaties, and limit the powers of the European Court of Justice to bring in by the back door the very things to which he is rightly opposed?

Mr. Hanley: If I have time, I shall come to that.

We are not going to add more employment law or social legislation, because that will not help the people of Britain or of Europe. Europe's employers are well aware of that. A large-scale survey carried out by UNICE, the Union of Industrial and Employers Confederations of Europe, last year found that employment law was the second highest cause of concern for business men. A survey last summer by the European Enterprise Centre found that two thirds of Europe's smaller companies were worried that higher social costs resulting from the Maastricht social chapter would make them less competitive.

Some member states are seeking to extend Community competence over employment at the intergovernmental conference. The UK will strongly oppose this, just as we shall oppose any suggestion that our social opt-out should be abolished. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made that very clear.

The need to create more jobs and to tackle unemployment is one of the highest priorities in Europe, but it is businesses and employers who create jobs and the Governments of individual member states who create the right conditions for employment. Jobs cannot be brought into being simply by legislating for them in the treaty. The way to create new employment in Europe is to improve competitiveness and productivity.

I must mention an issue that has been the subject of much lively debate inside and outside the House. The Government are awaiting the judgment of the European Court of Justice on the UK's challenge to the working time directive. The UK believes that the directive is a piece of social legislation that has been foisted on us in the guise of a health and safety measure.

We hope that the court will confirm our interpretation of the health and safety article 118a, which would exclude its use for such measures. If the court does not endorse our view, we will ensure at the intergovernmental conference that our concerns about possible erosion of our social opt-out, and about that directive in particular, are addressed. The Government's IGC White Paper "A Partnership of Nations" expressed our determination to ensure that the health and safety article of the treaty should not be used for social policy by the back door.

Now that some Labour Members are present, I can refer to their leader. He has tried to calm the fears of British business on several occasions, because the Labour party remains committed to signing the job-destroying social chapter. In that, it is playing true to form—more regulation and higher costs for employers, which will lead inevitably to firms going bust and to higher unemployment.

The right hon. Gentleman has tried to maintain that the Labour party would sign up to proposals for social regulation only if they did not inflict economic or competitive damage on British business. That claim is disingenuous, to say the least. The right hon. Gentleman constantly refuses to accept that, if Britain gives up its social opt-out, it will sign up to a future of European labour law, with unquantifiable consequences. The social agreement between the other EU nations contains substantial sections governed by qualified majority voting, and with QMV one cannot pick and choose those bits one likes and those one does not. The right hon. Gentleman's proposition is pure doublespeak.

One reason why more social policies have not been put through the social chapter is that Britain has an opt-out, and other countries do not want to give British business a competitive advantage. Our opt-out is protecting businesses across the whole of Europe from giving away competitive advantage to the rest of the world. Labour would give all that away. Adair Turner, director general of the Confederation of British Industry, has said that the way to pick and choose is not to sign up to the social chapter at all.

Kashmir

1 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): I am pleased to introduce this short debate on the future of Kashmir. I have notified the Minister that the hon. Members for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) and for Keighley (Mr. Waller) hope to contribute briefly. I am glad that my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff) and for Tooting (Mr. Cox) are in their places, together with the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway)—all of whom have taken a considerable interest in the Kashmir dispute over many years.

Since 1990, there has been a popular insurrection by the people of Kashmir in support of the right of self-determination, for which they have struggled in the face of a determined effort to eradicate their state. We have seen the displacement of 2 million Kashmiris over a long period, the killing of 40,000 Kashmiris, the murder of an entire generation of young Kashmiris, and the transfer of large numbers of non-Kashmiris to Kashmir, with the clear objective of diluting the indigenous population and facilitating a more favourable electorate.

We have seen the occupation of Kashmir by 700,000 members of the Indian forces—one member of the Indian security forces for every 10 Kashmiris. We have seen the systematic destruction of the local economy, grievous pollution of the Kashmiri environment, gross human rights violations, systematic curfews, house searches, rape, torture, detention without trial and disappearances.

We have seen an orchestrated bid to remove political and other leaders of the Kashmiri people by assassination and disappearance, and sustained efforts to erode the Kashmiri language and culture. All that has occurred over many long years.

The recent elections in Kashmir were widely condemned by the international media, who reported widespread intimidation and coercion of Kashmiri people by Indian military forces. Before the elections, there was one member of the Indian military forces for every four Kashmiris.

The British Government have equivocated in the face of challenges to the free and fair nature of those elections. It was absurd of the Government to refuse to publish a report by a British high commission official from Delhi who observed the Kashmir elections, on the ground that it was a confidential internal document. That absurdity caused widespread concern in the House and outside, and I hope that the Minister will say today that the report will be published, so that we may all know the views of the British official who was asked to observe the elections.

The current view of the Indian Government is that state elections will take place in September. It is important that candidates should not be required to sign a declaration of support for the Indian constitution, and essential that a large number of international observers are present in Kashmir to monitor the elections.

The new Indian Government have received an overwhelming welcome. We all wish Prime Minister Gowda well in overcoming the awesome problems facing his country. Senior members of his Cabinet are known for their sympathetic understanding of the Kashmir dispute, which they have demonstrated in courageous ways in the past. I think particularly of Foreign Minister Gujral, Home Minster Gupta, and Defence Minister Yadav of the United Front Government of India.

A recently published document, "The United Front: A Common Approach to Major Policy Matters and a Minimum Programme" concludes:

> "India today is in the midst of a major transition in its economic, social and political life. This is a transition period which will be guided by the need to strengthen the principles of democracy, secularism, federalism and social justice. The ethos of our humanist tradition and the aspirations of the Independence struggle inspire the United Front Government to carry out the above programme. In the building of this new India of equality, justice and fraternity, we seek the fullest participation of all citizens. The hallmark of the United Front Government's approach will be the greater and greater involvement of our people in all its endeavours."

The section on Jammu and Kashmir states:

> "the problems of Jammu and Kashmir will be resolved through giving the people of that State the maximum degree of autonomy."

That important statement comes from a new Government who have clearly broken the mould of Indian politics, which will never be the same again now that the Gandhi dynasty has been broken. In the climate of enormous opportunities and challenges that that presents, the British Government should say what they propose to do. This country has a shared history with the Indian subcontinent. The core reasons for the Kashmir conflict go back to before independence in 1947. We carry an enormous responsibility for the present situation. The situation in Kashmir today is unacceptable to the international community and to the vast majority of the British public, including the Kashmiri community in this country.

Do the Government have the will and political determination to encourage talks between the Governments of India and Pakistan—if necessary, talks about talks? The UK convened several conferences to resolve the Bosnian conflict. Why not a conference in London to find a way out of the Kashmir conflict? We have appointed a special envoy to try to resolve the Cyprus dispute. Why not a special envoy to do the same in respect of Kashmir? There are close parallels.

Will the British Government press the Indian Government to allow access to Kashmir by UN rapporteurs—particularly those responsible for investigating torture and executions? It is intolerable that successive Indian Governments have isolated the people, problems and conflicts of Kashmir from world and international opinion. They have consistently refused Amnesty International and other human rights groups access to Kashmir and the right to move freely around the country.

Will our Government now press the new Government of India to allow human rights groups access to Kashmir? Will they press the new Government of India to grant visas to Lord Avebury and an international mission which applied for visas weeks ago, which wishes to mediate on the hostages taken more than a year ago in Kashmir? We shall all appreciate it if the Minister gives us the latest reports on the hostages.

We should remember that the people of Kashmir have demonstrated against and condemned the taking of hostages and condemned those who were responsible for taking the hostages, who were kidnapped more than a year ago. Several leading Kashmiri politicians have sought to mediate and ensure that those hostages are released immediately alive and well. So Kashmiri politicians and the Kashmiri people do not condone hostage-taking. Indeed, their struggle is for the right to self-determination and it is clearly based on democratic means.

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): Will my hon. Friend confirm that, since 1947, there have been elections in Kashmir, and democratic Governments have been established who have not at any stage demanded independent status for the people of Kashmir? Does he accept that there is outside interference, and that the terrorists who are killing ordinary people are being armed from outside? Those who have taken up arms are not even citizens of Pakistan, but citizens of other countries.

Mr. Madden: My hon. Friend has a perfect right to express his views. I do not agree entirely with all that he says. As I said at the beginning of my remarks, it is clear that a popular insurrection is under way in Kashmir, which is based on the determined struggle for the right to self-determination. The outcome of self-determination is for the people of Kashmir. We are concerned that the people of Kashmir should be given an early opportunity to decide the destiny of their country.

Will the British Government press the Government of India to allow journalists from around the world freely to report what is happening in Kashmir, and to allow Members of this House and the other place easy access to visas to enable them to visit Kashmir and talk to the people of Kashmir?

Kashmir represents today the most serious threat to regional peace. Both India and Pakistan have gone to war over Kashmir. Both now have nuclear capability. Both countries are using enormous amounts of scarce resources to purchase military hardware and pursue a military solution in Kashmir. That is unavailable; there is no military solution to the Kashmiri conflict. There can be only a political solution. We need to encourage India and Pakistan to declare war on poverty and use their scarce resources to relieve the awesome poverty that both countries confront, and not to pursue military means of resolving the Kashmiri conflict.

Her Majesty's Government have a key role to play. They have a responsibility to find a lasting, peaceful, political settlement. I hope today that we may hear from the Minister some change of thinking and, more particularly, some indication of what action Her Majesty's Government are prepared to take. A more proactive, robust role would be widely welcomed, and might bring a resolution to the conflict earlier rather than later.

1.13 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) for the opportunity to participate in this most valuable debate. One of the encouraging aspects of the long dispute in Kashmir is that, for many years, there has been a bipartisan or tripartisan approach to the issue among Back-Bench Members.

The long conflict over Kashmir can be regarded only as a terrible tragedy, not only for the people of Kashmir but for all the people of the subcontinent. Kashmir's status is essentially the nub of the serious tension which exists between the two great powers of India and Pakistan. It is difficult to imagine the enormous cost to both countries of maintaining such substantial defence forces, which are largely devoted to this single conflict in a small part of south Asia. As the hon. Member for Bradford, West said, the cost greatly outweighs the resources devoted to education, health and social services in the subcontinent.

Britain and other aid-giving countries cannot be indifferent to the disparities in Kashmir. Therefore, although the conflict cannot ultimately be resolved without the commitment of both India and Pakistan, we have a duty to express our concern, and exert some pressure on the parties to negotiate seriously about the future of the territory.

As the hon. Member said, the irregularities and abuses in the most recent elections were well documented in the world's media. New elections for an assembly are now planned by India, and it is most important that international observers should be allowed to be present. I hope that Her Majesty's Government will put some pressure on India to allow that to take place.

The nature of the powers in south Asia in the world today make the dispute in Kashmir one of the most intransigent and dangerous. I hope that, in the 50th year since independence and partition, if we cannot look forward to an imminent resolution, at least some significant progress can be made towards that happy outcome.

1.16 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) for allowing me a little time to intervene in this debate. It is a shame that we have such a short debate. I should like us to have a long debate in the House in Government time about Kashmir.

We are all aware of the documented evidence of torture. We know that cases of rape occur daily. It is intolerable for the people of Indian-controlled Kashmir that the situation should continue. I hope that the Government will use their good offices with the new Indian Government—there is hope now because there is a new Indian Government—to persuade them to come to the negotiating table along with Pakistan to find a just solution and to consult the people of Kashmir. The people of Kashmir have a right to self-determination and to discuss and decide their own future. We cannot continue in this way.

I sincerely hope that the Minister will give us some reassurance today that he and his Government are prepared to put pressure on India to make sure that the human rights abuses stop and that India comes to the negotiating table.

1.18 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) for requesting this debate. I know that the Kashmiri situation continues to be a matter of great concern to him and his constituents and to many others on both sides of the House, as the debate demonstrates. It is also a matter of serious concern to the Government, as I am sure everyone is aware. Therefore, I am pleased to have an opportunity to explain the Government's thinking on this difficult issue.

I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), who is the new Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. As from the end of this debate, he will have direct responsibility for south Asia, in which I wish him well. He is assiduous in his research.

[Mr. Jeremy Hanley]

I can assure the hon. Member for Bradford, West that we pay close attention to developments in Kashmir. That has always been the case, and it is even more so now. Indeed, for more than a year we have had a permanent presence in Srinagar as part of our continuing efforts to secure the release of two British citizens, Paul Wells and Keith Mangan, who were kidnapped by militants last summer. They were taken, together with an American, a German and a Norwegian, in early July 1995. Very sadly, the Norwegian was killed in August 1995, and we have not had proof of life for the others since 28 August 1995.

We should not debate the subject of Kashmir without remembering the suffering that all the hostages' families have been through, and continue to endure. Members of the Foreign Office's consular division are in contact with them daily. Our thoughts are always with them and their loved ones as efforts continue in Delhi, Islamabad, Srinagar and capitals throughout the world to find out what has happened to them. These four are caught in an issue that is not of their making, and we owe them all our efforts.

Hostage taking is counter-productive. The kidnapping of Paul, Keith and the others has done nothing but harm to the Kashmir cause. Political leaders in the valley know that. We are grateful to those who have demanded the release of our citizens. We ask those political leaders, and others, to redouble their efforts to help us to establish what has happened to the four of them.

Kashmir has been a theatre of conflict for far too long. The Kashmiri people deserve better than to live their lives in an atmosphere of violence and intimidation. It is 10 years since I was last there, but I remember the beauty of the landscape and the friendliness of the people. Kashmir's reputation has led many thousands of tourists to the edge of Lake Srinagar, to trek into the hills or to buy the excellent carpetware for which the region is rightly famed. Kashmir had a successful tourist industry, but it is no more—the insurgency has ended that. It has brought danger to the region. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office now advises British visitors not to go. We do not want more kidnaps.

Kashmir has been a theatre of conflict for too long. It continues to bedevil relations between two great countries, India and Pakistan, two great friends of the United Kingdom. We regret that.

I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members are familiar with our policy on Kashmir. We believe that the way forward must involve simultaneous progress on three fronts. The first is bilateral dialogue between India and Pakistan. Self-evidently, both India and Pakistan are crucial to a settlement, but it is not easy, because they are two neighbours who do not talk. We would like them to, not only on Kashmir but on the full range of bilateral issues, and we have told them so and written to tell them so.

The atmosphere now is encouraging—better than it has been for some time, as the hon. Member for Bradford, West rightly deduced. Since the election of a United Front Government in Delhi, both sides have expressed a willingness to resume talks. We warmly welcomed that. This might initially be at senior official level, continuing talks last held in January 1994. There is no agreement to do so yet, but quiet diplomacy is continuing behind the scenes. We take this opportunity to urge both sides again to agree to hold talks.

Now is surely the right time. It is 25 years since India and Pakistan last went to war. Twenty-five years after the second world war, victors and vanquished had formed new alliances. They had recognised that it made more sense to work together for common prosperity, as equal partners, than to turn their backs on one another. The same could be true in south Asia.

If India and Pakistan do resume talks, I hope that they will agree to open a new chapter in their relationship, to try to establish greater trust between the two Governments and the two peoples. We are keen for greater links to be developed between the two—more trade, more tourism, more exchanges. The hostility that has existed between these two great countries, both Commonwealth nations, with so much in common, has spawned, fanned and sustained the violence in Kashmir.

But what about the Kashmiris? Should they not have a say in the future of their home? Yes, of course they should. An improvement in the relationship between India and Pakistan is a sine qua non for any lasting settlement to the Kashmir problem; but equally important is the development of a genuine political process in which the aspirations of the population can be accommodated. We have not spelt out what that process should be, because it is not for us to do so, but we have said that elections can be part of the process.

There has been much interest in the House in the parliamentary elections held recently in Kashmir. Members on both sides of the House have criticised them, noting specifically the allegations of coercion that were reported in the Indian and international press. We saw those reports of pressure being exerted on people to vote, reports which we are not in a position to dismiss. The elections were not perfect—the statements of the Indian election commissioners implicitly recognise that—but the issue is peace and how to get there.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs said in the House on 10 July, free and fair elections can play a part in leading the way from violence towards dialogue and a political settlement of these difficult problems. The voting in the parliamentary elections showed that elections there can take place, and that many of the population want to vote. They are fed up with violence; they want peace. We can all sympathise with that, because terrorism does not offer a way forward. Democracy does.

The hon. Member for Bradford, West mentioned the publication of the high commission's report on the elections. The report was written by one member of our high commission who visited Kashmir during the elections. It is not possible to publish a copy of the report, and it is therefore not possible to place it in the Library of the House, because it is a confidential internal document. I believe that it contains critical information, which we should absorb. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we take the internal report very seriously.

It is important that we try to encourage elections, and that they be free and fair.

Mr. Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Small Heath): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, because I know that time is short.

I too very much welcome the opportunity for the Kashmiri people to express their opinions, but does the Minister accept that it is crucial to a democratic process that people be allowed the right to say what they want and to express their opinions on the whole political position? Is it not the case that the elections that the Indians are talking about would take place on the basis that, unless candidates subscribed to the Indian constitution, they would be committing acts of treason, were they to advocate, for example, that Kashmir should not be part of India? That surely cannot be a true democratic process.

Mr. Hanley: The House should be aware that the Indian authorities want to hold state elections in Kashmir in the autumn; these will be the first state elections since 1987, and will bring an end to President's rule from Delhi. It is only right that the people in Jammu and Kashmir should have the right to elect local representatives and be governed by them, and we hope that, if elections are held, militants and political leaders in the valley will allow those who wish to participate to do so, and that the wishes of those who prefer not to vote will be respected.

If the Indian Government decided to invite international observers to monitor the elections, we would definitely welcome that, and it would enable the elections—

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Would my right hon. Friend briefly give way?

Mr. Hanley: As long as it is very brief.

Mr. Jessel: I said "briefly". In welcoming these provincial elections, will my right hon. Friend make it clear that it would be quite wrong if anyone was scared off voting by militant terrorists?

Mr. Hanley: Absolutely; indeed, I have just said that. I agree with my hon. Friend.

If the Indian Government decided to invite observers, we would welcome it; it would allow the elections to take place in an atmosphere of greater trust—that is something that has been lacking in previous elections. Furthermore, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs said on 10 July, it would make an important and significant contribution to the credibility of any electoral process in such a sensitive area.

Elections must be part of the process, but there must be a dialogue between the Indian Government in Delhi and the political leaders in Kashmir if peace is to return, and the development of a genuine political process is important. So too is the improvement of human rights there. The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) spoke graphically on that subject.

The situation continues to cause us grave concern. Members of the security forces continue to be implicated in allegations of human rights abuses. Recently, there have been some improvements in the position, but we should like to see more.

The greatest threat to human rights in the region is the cycle of violence that the local population has had to suffer since the insurgency began. We have long called for an end to external support for this violence, but, sadly, it continues. Indeed, it seems likely that many of those responsible for the kidnapping of Paul Wells and Keith Mangan were not Kashmiris.

I recognise that terrorist violence makes life difficult for the security forces in Kashmir, and that they are there in large numbers. As hon. Members know only too well, terrorism must not be allowed to triumph, and tough action is necessary. But the fight against terrorism must not compromise respect for human rights. We know that from Northern Ireland, where our forces are conscious of the need to respect human rights in maintaining law and order.

I am grateful that the Indian Government are showing a willingness to give access to outside observers and international humanitarian organisations. A key development was their agreement in the past year to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross access to Kashmir.

So what can the UK do? First, it is not right for us to seek to impose a solution. It is for those directly involved to discuss the way forward. I am often asked by those who fail to understand the complexity of the situation why the UK could not mediate. Mediation would work only if the fundamental conditions were right, and both India and Pakistan wanted it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The next debate is on the defence industry in the north-west. I call Mr. Nigel Evans.

Defence Industry (North-west)

1.30 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this vital issue concerning the importance of defence manufacturing in the north-west and I am delighted to have the support of so many of my colleagues from both within and outside the north-west. Those include, from outside the north-west, my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) and my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) and, from within the north-west, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins). My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) will be interested in some of what I shall say and would wish to participate if he could, but I am extremely grateful to see him in his place.

I am also pleased to see my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins), for Southport (Mr. Banks), for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) and for Wyre (Mr. Mans). Opposition Members from the north-west include the hon. Members for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), for Burnley (Mr. Pike) and for Rochdale (Ms Lynne). The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) must also be interested in this debate.

Britain has a long and distinguished history in international affairs, which has bequeathed us a unique role on the world stage today, from the time when the sun never set on the British empire to present-day conflicts. We are the only country to be a member of NATO, the European Union, the Western European Union, the Commonwealth and the Group of Seven leading industrial countries, and a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

As President Chirac noted earlier this year, Britain has a long tradition of action abroad. That proud tradition has continued under this Government, with our troops, aircraft and Navy not only protecting our protectorates and assets abroad, such as the Falklands, but participating in grand coalitions of states enforcing the rule of law. That can be seen time and again—for example, in the Gulf, when our Tornado fighters, built in the north-west, were the first to brave enemy anti-aircraft fire and bomb Baghdad, and, more recently, in Bosnia, with UNPROFOR enforcing the peace process.

We are still a nation with a global reach. Even if it is not all that it once was, we can still hold up our heads with pride. For example, in one month in 1995, British forces were deployed or carrying out exercises in more than 30 different parts of the world. We are proud to continue that tradition, but we must ensure that our troops continue to be the best armed in the world.

Defence procurement now goes some way to achieving that goal. It accounts for 40 per cent. of our defence budget. It is important to maintain technical superiority, the like of which we have in the north-west. The importance of defence procurement to the economy as a whole and in the north-west in particular is beyond question. Some 38 per cent. of net manufacturing output in the north-west is directly related to aerospace products, which are affiliated to the Consortium for Lancashire Aerospace. Its 127 member companies range from British Aerospace, Rolls-Royce and GEC to smaller companies, some with only five or six employees.

The number of jobs involved is staggering. Up to 40,000 people are employed in the industry. At least two other jobs depend on every aerospace job. We can see the devastating effect that the cancellation or refusal of an order can have on the area from the loss of a 10-year lead in electronics and thousands of jobs when the TSR2 was cancelled by the then Labour Government in 1965 because it allegedly cost too much.

That was especially important to British Aerospace in Preston, where thousands of jobs were lost. The effect on the local economy was so severe that people still discuss the loss of that order today. We must not allow such catastrophes to happen again, as they would if Labour ever had a chance to put into operation its plan to slash defence by £4.5 billion. New Labour would certainly mean new danger to jobs in the north-west.

Today, the British armed forces are better armed and equipped than they have ever been, not only in high-tech weaponry but in boots and clothing, and I congratulate the Government on that considerable achievement. To continue it, we must guarantee the success of the British defence industry, especially the expertise and skills for which the north-west has become famous.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble and I have visited British Aerospace, Samlesbury, in my constituency several times and marvelled at the skills there. Many people from all our constituencies work in the factories there, and at Warton just outside my constituency. Their projects include the Eurofighter, which is set to be a major success, despite the fact that, only a few months ago, there was a major dispute between the four partner nations—Britain, Germany, Spain and Italy—over who should get how many finished aircraft, and over the flight control system.

The Eurofighter is a magnificent aircraft, which I saw in flight at Warton recently. It has advantages over all its competitors, particularly the American F22, which, although it allegedly has a better flight control system, could cost £20 million more per plane. The French Rafale, although roughly the same price, is easily out-performed by the Eurofighter, and the far cheaper Swedish Grippen is much inferior.

We must never forget the strategic importance of having a manufacturing base that is capable of producing aircraft such as the Eurofighter. It has an extremely good chance of being a commercial success, which can but benefit this country. An amazing number of jobs are tied into that project. Once British Aerospace has received the production investment go ahead, the number of people directly employed on the project will be 2,000. That does not include outside contractors or service industry providers, of which there are many.

According to an article in *The Times* earlier this week, if the aircraft is as big a success as early indications suggest, as it has advantages over all its main rivals, it will have a significant impact on dole queues in the Lancashire area. I urge the Government not to ignore that.

Defence is the life-blood of the north-west economy, and we have become world beaters in that area. It is essential, however, that the Government make the right choices in their procurement programme—unlike the Labour Government of the 1960s who, through their short-sighted penny pinching, consigned many skilled Lancashire workers to the scrap heap and lost us a massive lead in military technology, which filters through to civilian life and benefits us all.

Opposition Members call for diversification, but we must remember the importance of the defence manufacturing industry to the north-west, the fact that the skills base remains in the north-west, and that exports and research are important.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Evans: I was about to refer to the Nimrod upgrade.

As the prime contractor and design authority for Nimrod 2000, British Aerospace will take responsibility for many aspects of the plane, including the flight and test evaluation. All management and integration tasks will be carried out at Warton, thereby ensuring the retention and development of those key technologies for future airborne weapon system platforms.

But it is not only British Aerospace that will benefit directly from a contract of that size. Arrangements are in place for north-west industry to gain from contracts. Indeed, 68 companies already benefit from the £50 million-plus-worth of business that comes their way each year as subcontractors to British Aerospace Military Aircraft division alone. However, the Nimrod contract will be worth £212 million to the region as a whole.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Evans: Several hon. Members from the north-west contacted me earlier to ask whether I would give way to them during the debate. I said yes to all those hon. Members, none of whom included Opposition Members.

The Nimrod contract represents a total of 5,825 jobs in the north-west. Of those, 3,000 jobs will go, directly and indirectly, to British Aerospace, Warton. In addition, more than 1,500 jobs will go to subcontractors in the region, and a further 1,250 will go to other British Aerospace plants in the area.

As well as the immediate effects that a contract will bring, the export potential for the Nimrod 2000 has been examined by British Aerospace and the Department of Trade and Industry. They have estimated that the export market is worth more than £9 billion over the next 25 to 30 years, addressing both upgrades to existing fleets in the short term and the building of new aircraft after 2015 in the long term.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I know that he would wish to associate his remarks with our hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), in whose constituency Warton is located and who cannot be present for the debate due to ministerial commitments. Will my hon. Friend, the Minister and his scribe accept that it is not acceptable to delay the procurement projects that affect the north-west and other areas beyond the next few days? The decisions have been taken, and the agreements have almost been made. The Treasury must now give the go-ahead, and we expect that to occur very soon.

Mr. Evans: I am extremely concerned about the delay in giving the order for the replacement maritime aircraft. I understand that the Ministry of Defence has already made a decision. Many workers in the north-west and elsewhere expect that order to be given, and the delay is extremely worrying for them.

Sir John Cope (Northavon): I apologise for intervening in a debate about the north-west, but the issue is also important for my part of the country. I think that the Treasury must realise that, if it abuses the tender process by delaying beyond the arranged timetable, future orders will cost more.

Mr. Evans: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. I have referred to the Nimrod's export potential when the contract is awarded. A union official from British Aerospace contacted me this morning. He said that, if the awarding of the contract is delayed further, firms may not be able to keep their technical work forces together. We risk losing that skills base if we delay much longer.

The Chamber must send a message today, on behalf of those hon. Members who are interested in the matter, that the Government must pull their finger out. Many people are waiting for the order to be given; they want to get on with it, as many jobs and export orders depend upon it.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Does my hon. Friend agree that those in the north-west, like the two of us, and others, would be wronged if the process were reopened after decisions had been taken at the instigation of an American aerospace company? That would go down badly in the United Kingdom, particularly in the north-west.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We understand that the decision has been taken, and the Government must now act to secure those jobs in this country.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): The people in the south of England care about the matter very much. Has my hon. Friend had an opportunity to read today's Defence Select Committee report on the defence estimates, which says that it will not be able to recommend the defence estimates to the House when they are debated in October unless the Government fulfil the contract and the rest of the defence estimates as promised?

Mr. Evans: I have not yet had the happy opportunity of reading that report. However, I know that it is important to hon. Members that the contract be awarded as soon as possible. Many people expected that to occur before the House rose today, but I understand that the contract will be given during the recess.

Our message is loud and clear: the order contract must be awarded as soon as possible. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester, who cannot speak in the debate, has heard that message. I am sure that he will pass it on to those who need to hear it, so that action can be taken.

Other aircraft and missile orders besides Nimrod are important. My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) is interested in the matter as well. For instance, there is the Hawk trainer aircraft. I am delighted to see several Labour Members in the Chamber, some of whom signed the early-day motion in an attempt to prevent the export orders of Hawks to Indonesia using bogus information supplied by people who have no interest in defence manufacturing in this country. They would happily see those jobs exported to France, Germany and Sweden. I am delighted that the Government are turning a blind eye to them, and will

[Mr. Evans]

support those exports. It is important for defence manufacturing skills in the north-west that we support the Hawk trainer aircraft.

As well as jobs in the defence manufacturing industry, many other jobs in related industries will be affected. Local hotels, shops and other businesses provide services to defence manufacturing. We saw the damage that was done during the 1960s when the TSR2 order was cancelled. British Aerospace in Preston lost many jobs, and there was an enormous knock-on effect throughout the economy. People talk about those job losses even today.

I turn now to Royal Ordnance, as I have concentrated mainly on British Aerospace aircraft. It is a major employer in my area. Other companies involved in the defence industry provide many jobs in my constituency.

Mr. Atkins: Leyland Trucks.

Mr. Evans: Including Leyland Trucks, as my right hon. Friend has mentioned.

Royal Ordnance has three offices in the north-west, at Chorley, Blackburn and Radway Green, which between them employ 1,500 highly qualified technical and managerial staff. They also use several dozen subcontractors, and that accounts for a further 5,000 jobs. The peace dividend has meant falling orders for the north-west. The company is finding it difficult to compete against overseas competitors, which are often state-sponsored.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. According to the Register of Members' Interests, the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) has taken several trips at the behest of British Aerospace. Should he not declare an interest in the debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is not a point of order for the Chair. The Chamber is not the place to make such complaints. All hon. Members are familiar with the procedures of the House. They know that they can declare an interest in the House if they so desire, or through the Register of Members' Interests.

Mr. Evans: I have no problems with that; the information is there for all to see. British Aerospace, Samlesbury, is in my constituency, and, unlike the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), I stand up and speak in support of my constituents' jobs. I am not trying to destroy their jobs; I am backing them.

I call upon the Ministry of Defence to look seriously at the imminent contract for the SRA 1236 competition for a stand-off bunker-busting weapon, and to consider the implications for the north-west, without compromising the quality of weaponry in the infantry, should the contract go abroad. I am sure that some of the old doubts remain: such as, should we spend vast sums of money developing our own aircraft and munitions when we could buy cheaper abroad? That is an extremely dangerous path to tread.

No one could call me a friend of subsidies—I deplore the propping up of ailing state industries, many of which would be recreated under a Labour Government. However, our lean armaments industry is neither subsidised nor ailing. I am afraid that, if we ignore the strategic importance of the defence industry in the north-west and destroy it, we will never get it back. We will lose those skilled workers to France, Germany, the United States and elsewhere. We cannot afford to lose the technological and the strategic edge.

For example, if we were to import cheap Russian planes because the market is good at present and there is easy access to spares and munitions, what would happen if a hardline nationalist or communist took over in the Kremlin and denied us access to those parts? We would have squandered our technological lead, and we would be at the mercy of an unfriendly power. I urge the Government to take that factor into consideration.

There are other projects in the pipeline, such as the future large aircraft and the future offensive aircraft. We must ensure that we award the orders and contracts and look to the long-term future of the British defence manufacturing industry—of which hon. Members should be proud, rather than sitting back and carping at every opportunity. We must get behind that industry and support those men and women who are producing the aircraft, and who are taking a lead in exporting to the world and providing a great service to this country.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I mean no disrespect to the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, but several hon. Members were expecting the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to come to the Dispatch Box and make an announcement about the replacement maritime patrol aircraft, which affects hundreds of my constituents who work for British Aerospace in Prestwick. I ask you to demand that the Minister of State for Defence Procurement comes to the Dispatch Box today to answer the call by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), and to make that statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that it is for the Government to decide who appears at the Dispatch Box.

1.48 pm

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on his success in securing this Adjournment debate, and on using the opportunity to raise the defence industry's interests in the north-west. I know that he and other hon. Members representing constituencies in the region—not least my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), who is in his place sharing the ministerial Bench with me—work hard to impress on the Government the importance of the industry.

I also mention my right hon. Friends the Members for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) and for Northavon (Sir J. Cope), and my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre (Mr. Mans), for Southport (Mr. Banks), for Chorley (Mr. Dover), for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins), for Salisbury (Mr. Key) and for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier). If I have missed out any others, I apologise. I shall be even-handed in this matter, because I recognise the interest of the constituency of Bury—

Mr. Pike: Burnley.

Mr. Taylor: Burnley—I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. I know Burnley, at the top end of the Rossendale valley, because my father came from Whitworth, so the hon. Gentleman will have to accept that it was a mere slip of the tongue.

I recognise the interest of the hon. Members for Burnley (Mr. Pike), for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) and for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), where my mother was born, and the interest of even the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes).

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): And our hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie).

Mr. Taylor: And our hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie).

Mr. Atkins: Hot Ayr.

Mr. Taylor: That was an unworthy intervention. I recognise the interest of my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now that the Leader of the House is in his place and as he is responsible for business, would it not be appropriate for him to bring the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to the Chamber so that he could be told—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already ruled on that. It is a matter for the Government to decide who is at the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Taylor: It is important for me to place it on the record, for the benefit of Members on both sides of the Chamber, that the questions under consideration are for decision by the Government. They are under the closest consideration, and there is not much more to it than that—except that, in our different roles, I share with my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester the responsibility for letting other Ministers know just how forceful have been the opinions expressed, and their importance in relation to the north-west in particular, and to other regions as well. I assure my right hon. and hon. Friends that I will not short-change them in getting across the strength of their message.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): No one in here feels anything—

Mr. Key: The hon. Gentleman has only just walked in.

Dr. Reid: At least I am here, unlike the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, who has not had the guts to come in and explain to the House why important defence contracts, which have been delayed for a year, have been further delayed. Why is he not here to respond to the defence procurement issues that have been raised?

Mr. Taylor: I defer to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in all matters of order. I thought that the hon. Gentleman was rising on a point of order, so I resumed my place. As it is, he has merely taken up valuable time that I should like to have spent addressing my right hon. and hon. Friends.

The contribution of the north-west to this industry is a major one. It is estimated that, in 1993-94, 12,000 people were employed directly by the defence industry in the north-west. The full employment impact is, of course, much greater, given the multiplier effects on indirect employment.

There are well-known centres of excellence in the north-west. British Aerospace Military Aircraft, based at Warton and Samlesbury, is world famous for producing a succession of splendid aircraft. The Hawk, Harrier, Tornado and now Eurofighter are all world-competitive products, of which the region can be justly proud. British Aerospace is the United Kingdom's leading exporter of manufactured goods. GEC Marine's VSEL shipyard at Barrow-in-Furness is another such centre. As Minister with special responsibility for the north-west, I visit the region regularly, and I hope to visit the Barrow region in the near future.

Behind those companies, however, lies a long supply chain of smaller companies whose interests must not be ignored. They are the backbone of the competitiveness of our major defence equipment suppliers.

Mr. Pike: I accept that the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) has rightly made the case for British Aerospace, but many small companies are also involved in the Orion project. Will the Minister recognise that those companies and their jobs are just as important to the north-west and to Lancashire as British Aerospace is?

Mr. Taylor: The north-west and small companies in the north-west have been handsomely represented by my right hon. and hon. Friends. They have no equivocation in their responsibility for supporting—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would address the occupant of the Chair.

Mr. Taylor: I fell to the temptation of wanting to be direct in engaging with my right hon. and hon. Friends, but I should like say to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that my right hon. and hon. Friends have no difficulty or equivocation in standing up for small business, for large defence contractors and for the defence of their country generally. They have no difficulty reconciling those duties, and they discharge them admirably.

I cannot say the same for Labour Members, who have a long history of not wanting to be associated in any way with the export of arms that are intended for destruction. Those who can come to terms with this country's fighting requirements can look that straight in the eye and have no problem with it, but Labour Members are humbugs on this subject.

Mr. Pike: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister is making statements that are not correct, and he should be careful that he does not mislead the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Minister is responsible for his own speech. I hope that I shall not get any further points of order that are not genuine points of order. I have waited in vain for many years to get one of those in this place, and I have not succeeded yet.

Mr. Taylor: Having been rebuked, but kindly, by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, once already today, I shall endeavour to discharge the rest of the debate in a manner that is as helpful as possible to my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley.

I want my hon. Friend to know that my Department has been active in seeking to ensure that smaller suppliers' interests are not ignored. This activity has included working with the Consortium for Lancashire Aerospace in developing their role in providing support to companies in the north-west. The Department of Trade and Industry has also funded the Society of British Aerospace Companies' competitiveness challenge programme. The British Aerospace Military Aircraft division at Warton played a significant part in the programme by leading the work on supply chains.

If I may, I should like to focus on the aerospace industry for a moment, as it accounts for the largest element of Government expenditure, in terms of both defence programmes and important civil programmes, the latter of which are supported by Government through launch aid and the DTI's research and demonstration scheme, CARAD—the civil aviation research and demonstration scheme.

My Department has an especially strong relationship with the industry, which was reflected in the joint statement issued by the DTI and the Society of British Aerospace Companies towards the end of 1995. Our developing relationship was fully recognised by the society through the launch of its national aerospace framework earlier this year.

This is an impressive document, and I pay tribute to the society and to its leading company members for producing one of the most systematic documents produced by an industrial sector that I have seen. The framework provides an excellent basis for the trade association, member companies and the Government to work together in partnership to benefit industry and the economy as a whole. I hope that the society will continue to work with the DTI on updating the document.

Government are, of course, close to the defence industry.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Taylor: No. I have little time to try to conclude the debate.

The Ministry of Defence is British industry's largest customer, and all its decisions on major procurements impact greatly on industry, including companies in the north-west. My Department is the sponsor of the industry, and we have recognised the importance of the sector by setting up the aerospace and defence industries directorate earlier this year. The directorate provides the focus for the DTI's relations with the industry, and works with the MOD on defence procurement policy and projects.

The Government have made it clear in their statements on defence procurement policy—for example, in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates" presented to Parliament by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in May—that industrial implications will be thoroughly examined in all procurement decisions. That is certainly true of the current procurements that my hon. Friend has mentioned.

Earlier this year, the Defence and the Trade and Industry Select Committees made recommendations regarding my Department's role in assessing the bids for Ministry of Defence procurement competitions. Indeed, the Committees expressed some satisfaction with the DTI's role in major procurement cases. The Committees urged the Government to extend that role to include smaller procurements.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Assisted Places

1. **Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent consultations she has had with independent schools concerning the assisted places scheme. [37265]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): I regularly discuss the assisted places scheme with representatives of independent schools.

Mrs. Peacock: Is my hon. Friend aware of the importance of the assisted places scheme to many children and their parents in Batley and Spen? Is she also aware that many people consider the scheme to be good value for money? It would be abolished by the Opposition, who cannot even get their own sums right.

Mrs. Gillan: I am well aware of the value of the assisted places scheme to many families and children throughout the country, including, in my hon. Friend's constituency, those who attend Batley grammar school. My hon. Friend is right: assisted pupils obtain good results—better results than similar maintained school pupils. Assisted pupils obtain up to three A-level grades over all subjects. The Labour party is completely wrong—at best, it has got its mathematics wrong and at worst, it is playing a con trick. Completely phasing out the assisted places scheme would still save only about £24 million a year, provide fewer than 1,000 extra teachers and reduce average infant class sizes by less than half a pupil. It is still nowhere near the Opposition's pledge to eliminate classes of more than 30 pupils.

Mr. Barry Jones: Does the hon. Lady know that, since its inception, the scheme has taken approximately £20 million in Wales? Does she accept that it would have been far better to have spent that sum on modernising, extending and refurbishing the older schools? Why not ditch the assisted places scheme, and the wretched voucher scheme?

Mrs. Gillan: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. The average cost of an assisted place is somewhat higher, but of the same order as an average maintained pupil place. The hon. Gentleman should be well aware that 80 per cent. of the assisted pupils come from socio-economic groups C1 and E—the lower-middle and working classes. The scheme is of great value to parents and pupils throughout the country.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I endorse everything that my hon. Friend says about the scheme, but may I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consider reintroducing in the next Parliament the direct grant scheme, which was infinitely better than the assisted places scheme?

Mrs. Gillan: I will listen carefully to what my hon. Friend says about the direct grant scheme but, as we all know, many of the direct grant schools were forced to become independent schools by the policies of the last Labour Government, if anyone can remember them.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I congratulate the Secretary of State on obtaining extra money for the assisted places scheme, thus enabling the imminent Labour Government to reduce class sizes more quickly. Will she now fight for equivalent funding for the 86,000 extra children who are to be in the system this year and the 60,000 who are to be in it next year on the same basis as she proposes to subsidise the independent schools under the assisted places scheme?

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman is up to his old tricks. He knows that the cost of the scheme is £114 million this year, rising to £118 million next year. He also knows that he could not phase out the scheme immediately as, under present legislation, it would take three years to phase it out. He has repeatedly asserted that the money would be used to reduce class sizes, but in the first year of phasing out, he would save no more than £5 million. However, if those children were educated back in the maintained sector at the cost per head of educating a child at Hackney Downs, there would be no change from the money that we put into the assisted places scheme.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend find it extraordinary that the Labour party is against assisted places in schools but in favour of assisted places in the shadow Cabinet?

Mrs. Gillan: If the Labour party is so keen to abolish assisted places, it had better start at home first.

Access to Work

2. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she has taken to monitor the impact of the new employer contributions on support for disabled people through the access to work scheme. [37266]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. James Paice): The Employment Service will be monitoring the new arrangements for access to work to ensure continuing effective help for disabled people.

Mr. Austin-Walker: Is it not already clear that this new scheme, by its reduced funding compared with that of the original scheme, is already having an adverse effect on both employed and self-employed disabled people, as they must now rely for equipment on their employers or fund it themselves? Does the Minister accept that the scheme will have a particularly adverse effect on people who are self-employed, who work in small firms or who are in voluntary organisations that employ many disabled people? Does he think that it is fair for the Government to impose a penalty on employers who have the best record on employment of disabled people?

Mr. Paice: No, I do not accept the points made by the hon. Gentleman. First, there is a considerable increase in funding for access to work this year compared with

funding for the original scheme—it is up by 50 per cent. Secondly, the contributions that would be expected either from an employer or from a self-employed individual are capped, and the average contributions are extremely low. On average, a self-employed person would be expected to pay £240, and, based on experience, it is likely that an employer would be expected to pay £540. I think that those are perfectly reasonable contributions to expect people to make to help disabled people. I emphasise to the hon. Gentleman that the access to work scheme is designed to help employers and individuals overcome problems created by disability. As has always been the case, if people are unemployed—I think that we would all agree that they are in the most need—they will make no contribution at all.

Mr. Tom Clarke: On all the evidence available to the Minister, does he accept that employer contributions are unfair to small businesses and to the self-employed? If the Minister really wants to support small firms and self-employed disabled people, will he now review their liability to pay up to £2,000 a year under access to work? Does the Minister accept that small firms simply do not understand why they are exempt from the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 but not from employer contributions under access to work? What is the difference?

Mr. Paice: The difference is in the legislation.

Mr. Clarke: Which one was wrong?

Mr. Paice: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman is making these points, because he totally opposed any exclusion for small firms in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Labour party—to a man and to a woman—went through the Lobbies on that legislation against the interests of small firms. It is somewhat hypocritical now to pray in aid the support of small businesses. The fact is that, as always, we have had to find a balance between cost to the taxpayer and the help that we want to provide to the disabled. I am amazed to find that the hon. Gentleman continues to be part of that group of Labour Members who seem to believe that the public purse is bottomless.

Schools (Security)

3. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action she is taking to enhance the security of schools. [37267]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): This question is about school security. Given that the matter of children's safety is involved in the answer to it, however, I should like to express my sympathy and that of Conservative Members to the parents, family and friends of Caroline Dickinson, the Cornish schoolgirl who was so tragically murdered last week in France. I should like also to express our sympathy and support for the head, governors and staff of her school, Launceston college.

The Government have accepted in full the 22 recommendations of the working group on school security.

Mr. Spring: I thank my right hon. Friend for her reassuring comments. What she said about the recent tragedies is endorsed by all hon. Members.

Is my right hon. Friend aware of the successful bids made by two schools in my constituency—St. Felix middle school in Newmarket and Mildenhall upper school—for closed circuit television, which will be greatly welcomed not only by parents, governors and teachers but by the community at large?

Mrs. Shephard: I thank my hon. Friend for that welcome. More than 100 schools have been able to benefit from the Home Office's CCTV scheme, which will be a useful addition to the security of children at the schools involved.

Mr. Turner: I know that the Secretary of State has already expressed sympathy to the parents, children and, indeed, the whole community in Wolverhampton, who were devastated by the tragic attack on the children and adults at St. Luke's school two weeks ago. I should like to say a very sincere thank you to all hon. Members who have, through the early-day motion that I tabled, expressed their good wishes and sympathy to everyone involved.

In view of that tragic accident, and many others that we have witnessed, would the Secretary of State consider bringing forward the moneys that I know that she has earmarked for next year into this year's budget? There was a call at the Conference of Local Education Authorities' conference last week, urging the Secretary of State to make more resources available. Wolverhampton is spending £60,000 this year, but that is wholly inadequate to meet security needs in our schools. Will she please consider giving the money in this financial year rather than the next?

Mrs. Shephard: This is of course a matter of great concern. As the hon. Gentleman said, I have been in touch with St. Luke's school in Wolverhampton. As he knows, schools and local education authorities are already spending on school security. The way in which the money will be spent is important. Schools have varying needs, and it is necessary that LEAs and schools conduct a thoroughly professional risk assessment of the type of arrangements that need to be made to improve school security. That is why they have already acted on some of the working group's recommendations on security, why we have already allocated more money through the CCTV scheme, why I announced yesterday that 60 schools would benefit from the schools renewal challenge fund to help them with their security arrangements, why LEAs already have guidance to help them decide how best to allocate the extra money when it comes and why schools will receive guidance in September. A great deal of work needs to be done. We will make new moneys available, but we have to be certain that they are allocated according to a school's need and spent in the best way.

Mr. Tredinnick: Is my right hon. Friend aware that part of the money that will be raised from this year's Burbage charity bike aid in my constituency will go towards CCTV in local schools? Will she congratulate the organisers on that decision and wish them well at that popular event, which is enjoyed by thousands of my constituents each year?

Mrs. Shephard: I congratulate my hon. Friend's constituents on their effort to help with arrangements for school security. There will no doubt be other such money-raising efforts but, of course, any money spent has to fit into a sensible framework to ensure that it is spent in the best way. As I said, the Government will be making extra money available.

Mr. Don Foster: I join the Secretary of State in her expressions of sympathy to those affected by the recent tragedies and repeat my congratulations on her seeking and gaining widespread support for the measures now being proposed to improve school safety. Although it may be impossible to implement immediately, does she agree that it would be sensible to agree in principle that, over time, all schools should have a single boundary?

Mrs. Shephard: Although I realise that the question was sensibly meant, that would be extremely difficult to put into practice because of the different geographical locations of school premises. It is important that schools assess their needs in the light of their own physical circumstances. In some cases, they may need a single boundary or entry point. The purpose of the conference that we intend to hold in the autumn will be to discuss best practice. Although there is a great deal of good practice, we found that those in the working group did not necessarily know about it. I take the hon. Gentleman's suggestion on board and the conference might be able to disseminate it, but there will also be many others.

Mr. Congdon: I welcome my right hon. Friend's comments about making additional funding available for school security. However, is it not important that we should not allow local authorities to get away with hiding behind the Government in respect of such an important issue? If a local education authority believes that priorities need to be addressed in terms of school security, should it not use the funds that are currently being wasted elsewhere rather than blame the Government for its own failure to act?

Mrs. Shephard: Many local education authorities are extremely concerned about those matters. They already have—as we have just dispatched it—guidance on the arrangements that will be made for the new GEST—grants for education support and training scheme—money that will be earmarked for school security. The money will be available next year. If there were any local education authorities that needed reminding, they have their reminder.

New Businesses (Failure Rate)

4. **Ms Janet Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the impact of the failure rate in new businesses on employment opportunities in the United Kingdom. [37268]

Mr. Paice: No direct assessment has been made, but research shows that new business survival, and hence employment potential, is affected by the level of business management skills and experience of the proprietor.

Ms Anderson: Is not investment crucial to the long-term success of new businesses and the creation of jobs? Does the Minister accept that Britain now has a lower level of investment than in 1989? Could that be why the number of jobs in manufacturing has fallen by 500,000 over the past five years?

Mr. Paice: The hon. Lady falls into the trap of equating numbers of jobs in a sector—particularly manufacturing—with the health of the sector. For decades, jobs have been shed in manufacturing because of automation and technology. That does not mean that the sector is less advanced or profitable—probably the reverse. All businesses need to invest, both in equipment—which is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor—and in their work force—which is my responsibility. That is why the Government have made a range of proposals targeted at small businesses and businesses generally to encourage them to invest in their work force.

Sir John Cope: We all support reductions in the failure rate of small businesses. The Government are doing a great deal—through business links and other schemes—to reduce that failure rate. Does my hon. Friend not deplore, as I do, the emphasis that the question places on the failure rate? The main employment effect of small businesses has been a massive increase in employment as a result of the massive increase in the number of small businesses since 1979 of about 1 million.

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend is entirely right. There are now more than 50 per cent. more businesses than there were in 1979. That in itself is good for employment. He is also right that we should not dwell on what are often described as failures. Just because a business may cease to operate does not mean that it is a failure. *[Laughter.]* In their laughter, the Opposition demonstrate how little they understand about businesses. A business may stop trading in the same name because it has been sold or because the proprietor has retired, or for a whole range of reasons. The NatWest survey of small businesses demonstrated that 73 per cent. of cessations were for reasons not associated with bankruptcy or solvency.

Mr. Meacher: May I associate myself and the Opposition with the words of concern and sympathy expressed by the Secretary of State about the tragic death of Caroline Dickinson last week?

Will the Minister confirm that the company failure rate, which we believe is significant, is running at nearly 1,000 a week and increasing, and that, each day, in the first three months of 1996, 2,500 people lost their jobs? Will he also confirm that, contrary to the impression that Ministers like to give—that unemployment is falling—the more accurate labour force survey shows that the number of people in employment fell by 74,000 in the first three months of this year and that there are still 1 million people fewer in jobs than there were the day that the Prime Minister entered Downing street? Is he not ashamed that, since 1979, Britain has had the worst job creation record of any major industrial nation?

Mr. Paice: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman took so long in asking his question because as he did so his facts became more and more obscure. Unemployment has been

falling consistently for a considerable time, thanks not only to the Government's economic policies but to our resistance of policies that would have damaged employment prospects: the social chapter and the minimum wage. Those are the Labour party's policies and they would destroy employment. Wherever the hon. Gentleman would care to look throughout the rest of Europe, he will find countries suffering from those problems. Unemployment in the major European countries is much higher than ours, and is often still rising.

Mr. Batiste: Is it not inevitable that, if there is a substantial increase in new business start-ups, there will also be a corresponding increase in the number of business failures? Is not the creation of new businesses the best way of increasing employment? Will my hon. Friend commit himself and the Government to maintaining that momentum by opposing the national minimum wage and the social chapter, which are so destructive to businesses and so often lead to failure on the continent?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend is entirely right. It is important that we do whatever we can to encourage small businesses and the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship that leads to their success. That is what the Government's policies are directed at. He is also right to remind us again about the minimum wage. Conservative Members have always been amazed by the fact that the Opposition have never said how they would resolve the problem of the restoration of differentials—a problem that is underlying the minimum wage and would destroy more jobs than anything else. We await with interest to see how they plan to address that issue.

Unemployed (Policies)

5. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what policies she intends to pursue in respect of those unemployed for 12 months or more. [37269]

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): We shall continue to pursue the policies that have seen long-term unemployment fall by more than a quarter since the start of 1994.

Mr. Winnick: When will Ministers apologise for the fact that the number of people out of work for 12 months or more has more than doubled since April 1979? Does that figure not show that unemployment has increased substantially during the 17 years of Tory government? The Minister is nodding. How much more human misery is to be inflicted on the country before this wretched Government are turned out at the election?

Mr. Forth: I can indeed confirm that unemployment is higher now than it was in 1979, as it is right across the European Union. The hon. Gentleman should cast his mind back to the 1970s, when everybody was doing well in terms of employment and unemployment. In the 1990s, life is tougher and more difficult. Compared with our European partners and competitors, we have served the employed and unemployed so much better because our policies have turned out to be more relevant to the needs of the 1990s. Opposition Members persist in turning the clock back to the 1970s—not only in their faulty memories but in their yearnings for policies that have long since passed—but the result of putting such policies into effect would be a return to the conditions of the 1970s, which were so much worse than they are today.

Mr. Ian McCartney: As part of the Government's programme of encouraging the unemployed to seek work, they have signed a contract with a company called Trinity Newspapers, which produces for distribution in jobcentres in England and Wales a magazine known as *Jobsearch*. Among other things, the magazine invites vulnerable unemployed men and women to take up prostitution as a business opportunity. My hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) has asked the Minister to withdraw that offensive magazine and its job advertisements, but was refused on the ground that the Department believes that the unemployed should have the widest possible access to job opportunities.

It is scandalous that such a magazine and such advertisements should have been distributed to vulnerable unemployed people. The Government's history of massaging the unemployment figures is wholly unacceptable. Will the Secretary of State today issue instructions for the withdrawal of the magazine and its accompanying advertisements, and initiate an inquiry into how it was ever distributed in the first place?

Mr. Forth: Before the hon. Gentleman massages himself into hysteria, I advise a little more calm. Of course I shall have a look at what he has described. If there is any substance to it, we shall see what can and should be done. *[Interruption.]* There is no point in pushing a piece of paper across the Table at me, because I do not know its provenance or the circumstances in which it came to be written. I prefer the approach of calm investigation and reflection to the hysterical outbursts that characterise the behaviour of Opposition Members.

We shall have a good look at what the hon. Gentleman has said and then, I have no doubt, we will take the appropriate action.

Sensorily Impaired People

6. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she has taken to monitor the levels of employment and unemployment among young people with sensory impairments after they leave full-time education or training. [37270]

Mr. Paice: The Department is funding a new national survey of disabled people and their employment, education and training, to provide information on different age groups and the impact of different disabilities.

Mr. Livingstone: Given that the unemployment rate among those who are hearing impaired is twice the national average, and that only one quarter of those who are visually impaired are in work, can the Minister guarantee that this survey will give us the tools that we need to analyse the pattern of discrimination? In particular, will he see what happens to people who have been through training programmes, to find out how effective those are, where the people end up, and what is the long-term impact of the training programmes?

Mr. Paice: Yes, I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. The survey will investigate the nature and severity of disability, employment status, characteristics of employment—permanent, temporary, part time, full time—qualifications and training, income and benefits, equipment, aids and adaptations, working arrangements, attitudes and experiences in the labour market, and household composition. What is more, the exercise starts today.

Sensorily Impaired Pupils

7. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils with hearing impairments are being taught in mainstream schools. [37271]

Mrs. Gillan: Statistics on the number of pupils with hearing impairments in mainstream schools are not collected centrally.

Mr. Timms: I am aware of the Minister's close personal interest in this matter. In the light of that, does she agree that we need data on the numbers and experiences of youngsters with disabilities in mainstream schools so that we can ensure that mainstreaming is working effectively for them? Should not such data be collected by the Government?

Mrs. Gillan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for acknowledging my interest in this matter; of course I shall look at what he says. Subject to certain conditions, local education authorities have a duty to provide mainstream places for children with special educational needs when that is what parents want. We have encouraged LEAs to integrate children with SEN in the main stream. I have seen radio aids being used in the classroom very effectively—they certainly level the ground for children with a hearing impairment.

While I am on my feet, the hon. Gentleman might like to know of Langdon secondary school, in his constituency, which has a learning support department that has recently twinned with the effectiveness division of the Department for Education and Employment. Teachers and pupils have visited the Department, and art from that school is on display in Sanctuary buildings.

Dr. Spink: Does my hon. Friend welcome the nursery voucher scheme, which gives an opportunity to spot at an early stage children with special educational needs, particularly those with hearing difficulties?

Mrs. Gillan: Of course I welcome wholeheartedly the nursery voucher scheme. I am pleased that, from April next year, parents of four-year-olds will have access to good-quality nursery education throughout the country, whatever the needs of the child.

A-level Results

8. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what research has been carried out to investigate the factors underlying the difference in A-level results between boys and girls. [37272]

Mr. Paice: A number of independent studies have been published, including a recent report funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

Mr. Rendel: The Minister is no doubt aware of the recent report that the differences may be due to the extra flair and self-confidence that young males are said to have at that age. If that is anything like the truth, what steps are the Government taking to ensure that it is not simply the format of A-level examinations that is producing the difference between males and females?

Mr. Paice: I am not sure to what the hon. Gentleman ascribes that series of assumptions. It is interesting that the gender difference at GCSE level is dramatically reduced by the time children get to A-levels. We also know—although I cannot explain it—that boys get more grade As while girls get more of all the other pass grades. No clear lessons can be drawn from that, but we are anxious to ensure that exams—whatever form they take—are right for all young people, regardless of gender.

Mr. Dunn: Is it not essential to maintain single-sex education for girls and boys, given that girls develop at a different rate in schools assigned to their sex only? This is the Government's policy and not that of the Opposition, who would destroy single-sex schools, grammar schools, city technology colleges and grant-maintained schools and go back to the old 1960s notion of neighbourhood comprehensive schools.

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend knows that the Government's policy is based on diversity and choice. It should be for children—when they reach a reasonable age—and their parents to decide on the right form of education, whether it be at grant-maintained schools, LEA schools or single-sex schools, but they must also decide which qualifications are right for them. That is why we have set out not only to maintain and improve the rigour of A-levels, but to provide general national vocational qualifications and modern apprenticeships so that something is available to everyone to make the most of their talents.

Ms Estelle Morris: Does the Minister accept that we are seeing a significant change in the relative performance at examination level of boys and girls, and that the consequences of that change extend far beyond the classroom? Is it not the case that the Government have failed to recognise this change and to take any action on the important issues that it raises? Will he give a commitment today that, as a useful first step, he will require the Office for National Statistics to provide statistics and information on how boys and girls perform as part of individual school inspections?

Mr. Paice: The Office for Standards in Education has already done that.

Teaching

9. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on teaching skills and methods employed in schools. [37273]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: All teachers need to be equipped with the most effective teaching methods and to know when to use them.

Mr. Arnold: Have not a number of reports highlighted the results of the trendy lefty education and training methods that we have had in far too many schools, particularly in inner cities, since the 1960s? Will my right hon. Friend assure us that, having introduced testing in the teeth of Labour opposition—which has highlighted where the shortcomings are to be found—the Government will continue their work on teacher training and get back to the proper teaching methods that will bring the results that the country is crying out for?

Mrs. Shephard: We have put in place several reforms of initial teacher training to ensure that teachers are equipped as practically as possible. We are also reviewing in-service training. Among the things that we have already announced are the 25 literacy and numeracy centres, the headlamp scheme to train newly appointed heads and a new national professional qualification for headship. In September, I intend to announce plans to reform initial teacher training and to introduce a national curriculum for it to ensure that all teachers are trained in the most effective manner.

Mrs. Wise: Does the Secretary of State agree that whatever the teaching skill, and whatever methods are employed, the effectiveness of teaching is enhanced if class sizes are smaller rather than steadily increasing, as they are at present?

Mrs. Shephard: We have heard a great deal from Opposition Members about smaller classes and how they would seek to fund them by raiding the assisted places scheme budget, thereby depriving children from some of the worst-off families in the land of the chance of an excellent education in the independent sector. I wonder whether the hon. Lady knows that the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales has told her Front-Bench spokesmen that their figures take no account of how the extra money identified by them would reach schools or of the extra costs of, for example, accommodation for the additional number. I am sure that she will be concerned about the fact that Labour's advisers say that its figures do not add up.

Mr. Redwood: Over the summer, will my right hon. Friend reconfirm that traditional methods and whole-class teaching have much to offer to improve primary school standards, and will she give strong support to the chief inspector, who is doing admirable work to highlight both good and bad performance and to offer some leadership in the profession?

Mrs. Shephard: Yes, the chief inspector has provided some stringent comments on what needs to be done to improve education standards. Teachers should certainly be equipped for whole-class teaching to provide active instruction rather than passive supervision. That is what we intend to put in place.

Higher Education

10. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals she has to maintain standards in higher education. [37274]

Mr. Forth: Prime responsibility for maintaining standards in higher education rests with the academic institutions, acting individually and collectively.

Dr. Wright: Does the Minister agree that quality in higher education depends on having common degree standards in different institutions, from Birmingham to Bradford and from Leicester to Luton? What is his response to the evidence, now confirmed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, that institutions differ markedly in degree standards both between institutions and between subjects, sometimes deliberately? Is not that unfair to students who rely on degree standards for entry to postgraduate work? Does it not devalue higher education?

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman must know that there is a system of quality assurance in place and that there is a continuing effort to try to improve it to make it even more effective. I wonder whether his comments reveal the hidden threat to the academic autonomy of our higher education institutions that his party poses. One could readily conclude from his words that he would seek to impose a straitjacket on our higher education sector, which has for so long prided itself on its autonomy and independence of government.

Nursery Education

11. **Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she has taken to ensure access to nursery education for children with special needs. [37275]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Act 1996 will ensure that all children, including those with special educational needs, have an equal opportunity to experience good-quality nursery education.

Ms Jackson: Has not research in Britain and America shown that flat-rate vouchers impact against children with special needs because their education requirements inevitably cost much more? Precisely what is the Secretary of State going to do to ensure that children with special needs will not be denied places, which are of particular importance to them, in nursery schools?

Mrs. Shephard: I agree that nursery education is particularly important for children with special educational needs, to which a lot of attention was paid during the passage of the Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill. The new money made available as a result of the voucher scheme will contribute to meeting the needs of all children, including those with special educational needs. Local education authority budgets will be reduced only by £1,100 for each four-year-old who has a maintained place. If a place costs more, the difference is left with the LEA. If a child returns to the LEA for its nursery place, so does the money.

Higher Education Funding

12. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received regarding the planned funding of higher education in the period 1996–97 to 1998–99. [37277]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has received nearly 700 representations about higher education funding this year.

Mrs. Campbell: Will the Minister comment on Cambridge university's decision to accept money from British American Tobacco in view of that company's falsification of data about the addictiveness of tobacco? Does the Minister think that it is desirable for higher education institutions to be pushed into a financial position so extreme that they must accept money from such sources?

Mr. Forth: No, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on a decision by an entirely autonomous higher education institution.

Mr. Atkins: Is my hon. Friend aware that Lancashire county council has suggested that all funding for education, including higher education, is damaged by the area cost adjustment—which supposedly acts to the detriment of Lancashire and in favour of the south of England? Is my hon. Friend aware of any Labour-controlled council that benefits from ACA that would forgo it? Is he further aware that Labour Front Benchers do not have a policy on that matter?

Mr. Forth: I am not surprised by my right hon. Friend's last observation. We all eagerly await the emergence of Labour policy on the issue. My right hon. Friend makes a telling point. When we have a unanimous view from local authority organisations on the area cost adjustment, we will be prepared to consider it. I hear no unified voice from those bodies, but I await the day.

Mr. Sheerman: Surely the Minister is aware of the furore in the university sector in respect of higher education funding. Is not it the case, as vice-chancellors throughout the land are saying, that if the equipment used to teach postgraduate and other students of science and applied science is denied them, that will affect the quality of the degrees that are awarded? Ten per cent. of university income comes from overseas students. If standards fall—the Minister has seen the warning signs—higher education funding will be in dreadful trouble.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman used the word furore. Of the 140 higher education institutions, we have received between 50 and 100 letters. Of the country's 1.4 million students, we have received 200 to 300 letters, and from a total of 55,000 staff, we have been inundated with 200 to 300 letters. That gives some idea of the "furore".

Nursery Voucher Scheme

13. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to ensure high education standards in those places administering the nursery voucher scheme; and if she will make a statement. [37278]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): Any establishment participating in the nursery education voucher scheme must work towards a set of desirable outcomes for children's learning, submit to educational inspection and publish information for parents. Those and other detailed requirements will ensure a consistently high standard over the whole scheme.

Mr. Greenway: I welcome my hon. Friend's assurance on the quality of nursery education for four-year-olds. Will he give the further assurance that no three-year-old currently in nursery education will lose out under the scheme? What effect will the scheme have on the education of children by the age of five, in terms of the tests that, according to national press reports, they are likely to receive at that age?

Mr. Squire: The voucher scheme has no impact on three-year-olds—although I expect that, under the next Conservative Government, there will be a reasonable prospect of extending the scheme to cover three-year-olds. As my hon. Friend is probably aware, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a report from the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority on base line assessment, and we look forward to full public consultation this autumn.

Mrs. Fyfe: Has the Minister yet assessed the extra costs involved in providing a high-quality education for children with special needs in the voucher scheme? If he has not done it yet, why not?

Mr. Squire: The hon. Lady will have heard my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State say a moment ago that the cost of a statemented child over and above the £1,100 voucher value will be unaffected by the arrival of the voucher. The hon. Lady will be aware that power has been taken in the legislation to ensure that pre-statemented special needs children—an important category—will receive assistance from local education authorities. That will be part and parcel of the annual negotiations with local authorities in the ordinary way.

Grant-maintained Schools

14. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she is taking to monitor standards in the grant-maintained sector. [37279]

Mr. Robin Squire: Standards in grant-maintained schools are monitored in the same way as in local authority schools, particularly through Office for Standards in Education inspection reports and published performance data.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not surprising that the three grant-maintained schools in my constituency in Sutton are heavily oversubscribed because they have excellent results in public examinations? Does he agree that that is consistent with the Ofsted report, which has judged that 40 per cent. of grant-maintained schools have an excellent achievement record and that 30 per cent. are good and improving? Does he agree that all those achievements will be seriously at risk should we ever have in government a party such as the Labour party, which is hostile to grant-maintained schools and would introduce political control, remove schools' right to manage and spoil children's life chances?

Mr. Squire: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question. As it refers to standards, Madam Speaker, I trust that you will allow me to correct a statement made from

the Dispatch Box during the previous Education and Employment questions. It specifically referred to the believed fact that Westminster had the highest proportion of pupils achieving five or more grade A to C GCSE results in inner London. While Westminster has good results—better than many local authorities in inner London—I can confirm that Camden has the best results.

My hon. Friend is right in every material particular. The important thing to note is the threat the Labour party poses to grant-maintained schools, notwithstanding the fact that a number of Labour Members choose those self-same schools for their own children.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Minister agree that one of the main contributions to raising standards in schools comes from the example set by the brilliant pupil who sets the pace and the standard throughout the school? Does he agree that it is a terrible loss to such a school when pacemakers are turned out to go somewhere else? Why have the Government never examined the effect on schools that have been deserted when bright students leave to take up assisted places? When will the Government have an inquiry into that? They have all sorts of figures on assisted places, but they have never examined the damage done to schools, often in the least prosperous areas, when the brightest pupils are plucked from them and put into other schools.

Mr. Squire: I lost the hon. Gentleman a little when he reached his pacemaker, but I think I understand what he is saying. The best response is the truth that the Government believe that schools should reach for the best in every child, regardless of his or her ability. A few schools have too often used as an excuse for their poor performance matters such as the nature of their intake. That must not be an excuse.

On the wider issue of exemplars, the hon. Gentleman may be interested in some recent research which shows that, in areas such as Salisbury and south Birmingham, which have a significant number of selective schools, there is higher performance among the comprehensive schools than the national average and an improvement in recent years which beats the national improvement.

Mr. Pawsey: Given the fact that many parents and teachers are increasingly worried about discipline in the nation's schools, a point borne out by the recent Association of Teachers and Lecturers' survey, what action is being taken in teacher training colleges to emphasise the need to teach and instil discipline in the classroom?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend is right to highlight an anxiety that every opinion poll that I have seen shows is shared by parents throughout the country. It is important that teachers, whether they are teaching or coming out of training college, should have the ability to maintain order. As my hon. Friend is aware, we intend to legislate this autumn—assuming that there is opportunity—further to strengthen the powers of teachers in that respect.

Grammar Schools

15. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what funds she plans to make available over the next three years to set up grammar schools. [37280]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend will approve proposals for new schools—including new grammar schools—where they are needed.

Mr. Gunnell: I see that the Minister is offering no money even for this policy, in which she obviously believes. Does she believe that this policy is among those that have led to my selected Conservative opponent in Morley and Rothwell standing down and resigning because, he says, of the arrogance of the approach of some senior Tories?

There are three excellent comprehensive schools in Morley, to which parents are anxious to send their children. Does the Minister realise that, if a grammar school for Morley or south Leeds were created from one of those schools, fewer parents would get the school of first choice?

Mrs. Gillan: As usual, the Labour party has got the wrong end of the stick. We are not about forcing grammar schools on communities that do not want them. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman re-read the White Paper. If he does, he will see that the Conservative party is offering choice to communities—they may choose whether they want a grammar school in their town—unlike the Labour party, which is reported in the *Daily Mail* last week as "itching to axe the grammars".

That is the Labour party's true agenda. Not satisfied with forcing direct grant grammar schools into the independent sector, it now wants to remove grammar schools throughout the country.

Mr. Lidington: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in a well-run modern selective system such as the one that we have in Buckinghamshire, standards are being driven higher in the grammar schools and in the upper schools which, in the case of some in Buckinghamshire, are achieving results as good as or better than those of comprehensive schools in neighbouring local authorities? Does she agree that that is a tribute to the staff and governors of Buckinghamshire's schools and to the support that they have consistently had from the Buckinghamshire local education authority—in the teeth of hostility from representatives of both Opposition parties?

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend and I share that local education authority, so I have no hesitation in endorsing his comments. The schools in Buckinghamshire are an excellent tribute to grammar schools and comprehensive schools. The grammar schools are not bad for other schools. We studied the GCSE results in two areas—Salisbury and south Birmingham—where grammar schools and non-selective schools co-exist. In both areas, the proportion of pupils in the non-selective schools who achieved GCSE grades A to C rose significantly faster than the national average. Grammar schools are good for us.

Mr. Byers: Can the Minister explain how a return to a grammar school system will enhance parental choice when selection, by its nature, takes powers from parents and gives them to individual schools? Does the Minister agree with the Secretary of State, who told a delegation of head teachers recently that she personally did not want to see a return to the waste of talent inherent in a form of selection at 11? Do the Government still propose to have

a grammar school in every town? If so, how much would that cost and how many secondary modern schools would be created as a result? Is it not time that the Government put all our children's interests first instead of allowing political dogma to triumph over reason?

Mrs. Gillan: This party always puts the education of children first, as do many members of the Opposition Front Bench. The hon. Gentleman should read the proposals in the White Paper, which would make it easier to set up grammar schools wherever parents want them. The key to our proposals is choice and diversity, whereas the Opposition would remove choice. They would remove grammar schools and assisted places. They would go on to remove other forms of choice too, because their idea of education is to level everybody down whereas ours is to raise standards of education for all.

Education Provision

16. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent assessment she has made of the diversity of education provision between different local education authorities. [37282]

Mr. Robin Squire: There are grammar, specialist and grant-maintained schools in many parts of England, but their distribution is patchy. In many places, a generalist LEA comprehensive is the only choice of secondary school. The proposals in last month's White Paper will give schools more freedom to develop distinctive strengths, offering more choice for parents.

Mr. Hendry: Does my hon. Friend agree that one factor that determines different levels of education provision is the amount of money held back by each education authority to pay for its central services? Is he aware that Derbyshire holds back £642 per pupil whereas neighbouring Staffordshire holds back just £487? Does he agree that the easiest way for Derbyshire to make more money available for its schools is to cut its central services to the level of neighbouring Labour-controlled Staffordshire and make available an extra £155 per pupil straight away?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend is on to a good point. There can be no obvious justification for the wide disparity between the proportions of budgets delegated, which is why the issue was raised in the recent White Paper with a commitment to raise it to 95 per cent. of a school's potential budget. On the basis of that budget and the latest figures that I have, Staffordshire emerges as a markedly higher delegator than Derbyshire.

Mr. Barnes: Is the Minister aware that central funding for Derbyshire is so bad that the schools are in crisis? Louise Orrill, aged nine, points out that, in her class, the teacher no longer has a desk and 40 children are crammed into a classroom built for 25. Is not that disgraceful? Does not it have a serious impact not only on education but on children's safety?

Mr. Squire: It is disgraceful that some local authorities are so inefficient that they spend disproportionate sums at the centre, denying that money to schools. The decision to which the hon. Gentleman refers is a matter resolved by governors on the basis of the funding available to them. It is not a decision that the Government should take, but the Government and schools would be assisted if some local authorities were more efficient.

Sir Michael Shersby: What assessment has my hon. Friend made of the education provision for statemented children in grant-maintained schools in Hillingdon? Is it the Government's policy to fund statementing directly? Will he confirm that that is happening in grant-maintained schools in Hillingdon?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend has been assiduous in raising his concerns about the current situation in Hillingdon and the possible threat to the funding of statementing from that authority. As he knows, we are looking into the matter. I can confirm that, under the law, Hillingdon and all LEAs must meet the cost of statementing. It is essential that schools have adequate resources to meet those demands.

Disabled Children (Access to Schools)

17. **Mr. Pearson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals she has for further developing the access initiative to improve access for disabled children to mainstream schools. [37284]

Mrs. Gillan: Some 800 mainstream schools will benefit from the schools access initiative projects in 1996-97 to improve access to the curriculum for disabled pupils.

Mr. Pearson: While I welcome the £45,000 that was allocated to Dudley metropolitan borough council on a one-off basis this financial year, if that funding is not repeated in future, the parents of children with physical disabilities will view it as tokenism and a cheap pre-election bribe. What will the Government do to ensure that all children with physical disabilities gain access to their local mainstream schools?

Mrs. Gillan: I would not seek to make political mileage out of the issue, but the funding demonstrates the Government's commitment to integrating pupils with special needs into mainstream schools wherever that is feasible. We shall look at the expenditure for 1997-98 soon, and we shall take a decision about whether to extend the initiative based on what we have learnt from the 1996-97 bidding round. I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman had the decency to acknowledge Dudley's successful bid, which enabled four schools to improve access for the disabled.

Transmissible Encephalopathies (Sheep)

3.30 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg): If you will forgive me, Madam Speaker, I must begin with an apology. I am afraid that I have lost my voice. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hooray."] I think that that will be the most popular part of my statement. I shall, therefore, have to lean directly over the microphone.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that the engineers will increase the sound from that microphone.

Mr. Hogg: Madam Speaker, my original remark is more popular than your later observation. However, with permission, I would like to make a statement about transmissible spongiform encephalopathies in sheep. The subject was discussed at the Agriculture Council on Monday, and Commissioner Fischler said that he intended to put forward proposals for controls on sheep to apply across the Community.

Scrapie, a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy of sheep and goats, has been known for more than 200 years. There is no evidence that it is linked to Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans. CJD occurs at approximately the same level in countries with and without scrapie. I have recently received advice from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advice Committee—SEAC—that bovine spongiform encephalopathy could theoretically become established in the sheep flock. It notes that in experiments—the results of which have been published—one in six sheep experimentally challenged orally with BSE brain material succumbed to an encephalopathy and that, when their brain material was tested in mice, the same strain type as BSE was found. It notes also the possibility that some sheep could have been exposed to feed contaminated with the BSE agent before the ruminant feed ban was introduced in 1988.

The committee points out that there is no evidence of BSE occurring naturally in the sheep flock. However, SEAC is concerned that, while there is no evidence to that effect, scrapie might be masking BSE in the sheep flock. On the basis of present knowledge, SEAC has made three recommendations: first, that the Government should consider the issue further with our European Union partners, and we are doing that. We are keeping in close contact with the French Government, whose scientific committee equivalent to SEAC has made certain recommendations on the basis of the laboratory evidence about BSE in sheep and of concerns about scrapie. At the Agriculture Council on 22 July, Commissioner Fischler announced that the Commission intends to formulate proposals for the removal of certain offals of sheep and goats from the human and animal food chains. Those proposals are to be considered initially by the Standing Veterinary Committee in early August and then by other EU expert committees.

SEAC's second recommendation was that the Government should give early consideration to removing the brains of sheep, whatever their source, over six months of age from the human food chain. The agriculture departments are today issuing for consultation a proposal for the heads of all sheep and goats to be removed and destroyed in the same way as specified bovine material. That measure would go further than SEAC recommended, taking into account the practical difficulty of distinguishing the age of sheep at slaughter. It should not have a major economic impact as the vast majority of sheep's heads are already destroyed. It is worth noting that sheepmeat for human consumption comes predominantly from young lambs under 12 months of age.

We intend to reach a final decision in the light of responses to our consultation paper and progress in the EU discussion. Action on the issue at EU level would be preferable, but it is desirable, on a precautionary basis, that those measures are put in place promptly.

SEAC's third recommendation is that further research should be done to establish the levels of scrapie occurring naturally in sheep and to investigate further the risks of BSE transmission to the United Kingdom sheep flock. We accept that and some relevant research has already begun.

I emphasise that those steps are being taken out of an abundance of caution. There is no direct threat to human health. With the exception of the consumption of brains, there is absolutely no reason for anyone to change their eating habits. I repeat: there is no evidence at all that, in field conditions, BSE has got into the national flock, but as that possibility cannot be wholly excluded, we are proposing to take these precautionary measures. I am putting a copy of SEAC's advice and of my Department's consultation letter in the Library of the House of Commons.

Madam Speaker: It would make me a very happy Speaker if all statements were received in such silence. Thank you.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): May I put it to the Minister that, in dealing with matters relating to BSE and a possible link with CJD, we always need to err on the side of caution? It is on that basis that we support the precautionary measures that he announced today. May I also make it clear that it is vital that the regulations are properly enforced? We must have no repeat of the dreadful underenforcement of the regulations to keep the BSE agent out of beef and beef products, in the early years after it was identified in 1986. Is the Minister now taking steps to reverse the cuts that successive Conservative Governments have made in the State Veterinary Service?

In view of the trade in lamb throughout Europe, it clearly makes sense that any measures of this nature should be implemented across all the member states of the European Union. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that a number of member Governments at the Council meeting on Monday opposed the proposals? In that case, is he confident that, whatever the Standing Veterinary Committee decides, we can look forward to their being enforced throughout the EU and as uniformly as possible?

The Minister advised the House that the heads of all sheep and goats are to be kept out of human food. I should be grateful if he set out further the scientific basis for keeping heads out of our food, particularly in the light of the fact that, in relation to cattle, we keep intestines, thymus, spleen and spinal cords out of human food, again on a precautionary basis.

The Minister confirmed that the whole basis for the measure is the possibility—many people would say the theoretical possibility—that BSE is in our national sheep

flock. I welcome the fact that the right hon. and learned Gentleman intends to carry out research to see whether he can find any evidence of BSE in our sheep. Has he noticed today's statement by the president of the Royal Society, that there is an urgent need for more research into the subject in order to reduce some of the uncertainties?

We need to attach the highest priority to the health of our livestock, and it should be our policy to eliminate transmissible spongiform encephalopathies from our cattle and sheep.

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support, and I entirely agree with his assertion that it is right to act in a precautionary manner. I can confirm that when the regulations are put in place, they will be rigorously enforced, and I am confident that we have sufficient resources to do so. The hon. Gentleman will know that the Meat Hygiene Service has been recruiting substantially in order to discharge its existing duties with regard to BSE. It is true that there are some reservations in member states, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman when he says that it is desirable to approach the matter in an EU-wide way. I anticipate that any legally binding directives or decisions will be implemented throughout the European Union.

On the issue of brains and heads, the recommendation in SEAC's report extends only to brains. It does not extend to the spinal cord, although it is perfectly true that there is a French recommendation that does, albeit with a 12-months start point. The European Union vets will be considering that recommendation. For my part, I shall be annexing the SEAC recommendations and its report to the consultation document so that everyone has access to the advice that we have received.

I can confirm that we shall be looking into research to establish whether there is any evidence of BSE in the national flock. At the moment, there is no such evidence. I can also confirm that the elimination of BSE from cattle is a very high priority objective of the British Government. I can confirm that it is highly desirable for us to work out a strategy for the elimination of scrapie from the national flock.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd (Morecambe and Lunesdale): My right hon. and learned Friend has demonstrated that in scientific laboratory conditions BSE can be transmitted to sheep. What possible evidence is there that that happens in the field, particularly in relation to sheep that are younger than eight years old and have never been able to eat any bovine beef?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is right—there is no evidence that BSE has been transmitted to sheep in field conditions. We are acting out of an abundance of caution in a wholly precautionary way. But my hon. Friend was right to make his point.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): We are grateful to the Minister for making an oral statement, particularly given the condition of his vocal cords. I think that he was originally intending to rely on a written answer and it is to the benefit of the House that he has made a statement and that we have had an opportunity to put questions to him.

The House will agree that there is an urgent need to clarify the position, so will the Minister tell us precisely what he has agreed to in relation to British lamb? Is it not true that the precautionary measures are irrelevant to traditionally reared and traditionally butchered English—British—lamb? Is it not true that the English chop is safe in our time? Will he now give that assurance? Will he respond specifically to the point made by the British Veterinary Association, that the proposed regulations are ludicrous in relation to the British situation?

Mr. Hogg: It is true that I was thinking of relying on a written answer; an Adjournment debate was also planned and I was contemplating informing the House about the issues during that debate.

The hon. Gentleman asked what I have agreed to. I have agreed to nothing. I am in the process of consulting, in the manner that I have described to the House. Clearly, if the European Union promulgates EU-wide directives that are legally binding, I anticipate implementing them in this country—as I imagine that he would wish me to do.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the English chop. I am bound to say that I am not quite as partial as he is to it, in the sense that I am also concerned about the Scottish, Northern Irish and Welsh chop. Speaking of the UK chop, I think that it is a splendid product. It can be eaten in complete safety, and I look forward to doing so for very many years to come.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Perhaps the House has listened to this statement in such a quiet manner because, rather than suffering from July madness, we are suffering from crisis fatigue. Will my right hon. and learned Friend recall and reflect on the question so ably asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd), who got to the nub of the entire matter? Is it not a fact that we are leaving our common sense behind in responding to the Commission's proposals, which are totally unnecessary for our sheep industry?

Mr. Hogg: I have already made the point that we are acting out of an abundance of caution. It is our view that UK lamb—in fact, European lamb—is wholly safe. We have received advice. The French committee has advised the French Government, and SEAC, our advisory committee, has advised the British Government. Therefore, on the basis of that considered opinion—which will be made available to all hon. Members, including my hon. Friend—it is right to proceed in the manner that I have outlined to the House.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): This is another fine mess that the Agriculture Minister has got himself into—or that he has got the industry into. Surely he is aware that consumers do not trust him. Furthermore, he must be aware that he is driving producers to despair, particularly those who have to sell their lamb flock at this time of year, when the lambs are ready for market. Given that he has not only lost his voice, but lost the place, has not the time come for him to hand over responsibility for these affairs to the Deputy Prime Minister—or, preferably, to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang)—before any more damage is done to consumer confidence or to the rural economy?

Mr. Hogg: I think that the hon. Gentleman must have misunderstood the position adopted by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), who was, quite rightly,

[Mr. Hogg]

supporting the Government's position. The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) is in fact saying that we should override and disregard SEAC's advice. That is what he is saying, and I do not think that it is a sensible or a prudential way in which to operate.

Mr. Paul Marland (West Gloucestershire): May I be forgiven for wondering where all this will end? I saw that, in some quarters this morning, the judgment of the Agriculture Commissioner was being called into question, because these precautions are being taken on the flimsiest of evidence. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is good news that this is a European rather than a British initiative, so that the onus is no longer on the British Government? Will he confirm that already 99 per cent. of the sheep brains removed in this country are destroyed, and that these measures will have virtually no effect whatever on the British sheep industry? That is quite a contrast to what happens in France, where a large proportion of sheep's brains are used in regional dishes.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend think that there is any truth in the rumour that is today circulating round the House, that these measures are a dastardly plot by Euro-vegetarians, who are determined to put off everyone from eating meat and to promote nut cutlets?

Mr. Hogg: I have no difficulty in forgiving my hon. Friend in this matter, or in almost any other matter in which he asks for forgiveness. I have not the faintest intention of embarking on a diet of nut cutlets, and certainly not if they were the only thing that I was permitted to eat.

It is entirely desirable that the policy should be deployed on an EU-wide basis. My hon. Friend is right about that. He is also entirely right about the impact on the United Kingdom, as almost without exception—I am talking about 99 per cent.—the brains from sheepmeat in the UK are destroyed.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): Will the Minister confirm that virtually every species that has been challenged with BSE in the way that the French team challenged sheep has developed a BSE-like disease? Will he therefore explain what will be done with the sheep's heads that are not now going into the food chain? Will they be rendered down into meat and bonemeal, and will that meat and bonemeal still be going into animal pet food as well as being disposed of in landfill sites?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman will find that the latter point is dealt with at some length in the consultation document. It is perfectly true that BSE can be transmitted to many creatures. As for the brains, the head—leaving aside the tongue—will be removed and destroyed and will not go into pet food. It will be treated as the equivalent of specified bovine material.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): If we are to have these precautions, so be it—as my hon. Friend the Member for West Gloucestershire (Mr. Marland) said, they will not make a scrap of difference to the preparation of lamb for British and European tables. What livestock farmers will find difficult to understand is that it appears that the Agriculture Commissioner says that if we remove the brains and offal from lambs that theoretically might have BSE, lamb is safe. We have been doing that with British cattle for seven years, but we still have a ban on British beef. Why?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes a formidable debating point, which I shall not overlook.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I have many sheep farmers in my constituency who are very dependent on the export trade to Europe. Is not it in their best interests if we comply fully with the new European requirements, because we do not want trouble again with Europe on these matters in future?

Mr. Hogg: I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Colin Shepherd (Hereford): Does my right hon. and learned Friend recall that when the European Standing Veterinary Committee considered beef, its decisions appeared not to be based purely on scientific evidence? Is he confident that when the committee meets again to consider these matters, it will consider them only on scientific and veterinary grounds?

Mr. Hogg: It is very important that it should, but it is fair to say that in matters of this kind there is scope for more than one reasonable judgment. There is a difference, which I have already pointed out to the House, between the advice of SEAC, which confines the recommendation to brains from sheep of more than six months, and that of the French advisory committee, which talks of enlarging the prohibition to include the spinal cord and spleen, albeit only in respect of sheep over the age of 12 months. There is that perfectly understandable difference of opinion among scientists, which needs to be reconciled on objective scientific criteria within the EU's advisory committees.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Does the Minister accept that Welsh lamb is one of the great export success stories of recent years and that it is a quality product much sought after in France, Italy and Spain? Does he recognise that the statement by the Commissioner this time was distinctly unhelpful, bearing in mind the fact that many lambs are now coming on to our markets? Will he reinforce to his European counterparts the fact that the Commissioner's words must not in any way be used as a pretext to prevent our lambs going on to those markets?

Mr. Hogg: I recognise the importance of the export of Welsh lamb. I also recognise that it is a quality product. It is important that we do not allow any action to be taken to discriminate against United Kingdom products in any respect. I should make the point that we are dealing with very young lambs. The majority of the exports from Wales are substantially under 12 months and that, for example, would mean that if we were to accept the French recommendations, there would be no prohibition of any kind.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the price of lamb at Hexham auction mart yesterday fell by more than 20 per cent., which is bad news for farmers, who are already suffering a 30 per cent. drop in income because of the BSE crisis

in beef? Will he ensure that nothing is done to discriminate against English lamb in France by the French Government making regulations which would increase the processing costs of United Kingdom carcases, but which would not apply to carcases of French-bred lamb?

Mr. Hogg: I was aware of the fall in price to which my hon. Friend refers. When the consumer reflects on what has been said in the House and elsewhere, we shall find that consumer confidence bounces back and the price will be restored to its former levels. My hon. Friend is quite right in what he says about discrimination. I have had the opportunity to discuss the matter in some detail with Philippe Vasseur, the French Agriculture Minister, and I do not believe that there will be any such discrimination. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): These boys.

Has it been established what proportion of British sheep may have had access to dubious bovine feed?

Mr. Hogg: That information is set out in the consultation document. A detailed reply would take several minutes. The information is also in the SEAC report. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman will be able to find the precise answer to his question by reading the consultation document and the SEAC report.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does my right hon. and learned hon. Friend agree that it is impossible to prove a negative, so it is impossible to prove that there is any food that does not have some risk? Are we not in danger of a national epidemic of paranoia, which is far more damaging to the health of the nation—a nation that still has many smokers? Can we not put the whole matter in perspective during the quiet days of August?

Mr. Hogg: That is good advice.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Does the Minister recall promising during the evidence-taking sessions of the joint Health and Agriculture Committees that MAFF would co-operate with Dr. Harash Narang by supplying him with urine samples? A fortnight ago, at a meeting in the House of relatives of CJD sufferers, Dr. Narang said that he had not yet received those urine samples. Will the Minister tell us why not? Surely it is in everyone's best interests to have a live test validated.

Mr. Hogg: It is, of course, desirable that we should identify and develop an effective live test. We are perfectly willing to work with Dr. Narang, but co-operation has to be a two-way process.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Has my right hon. and learned Friend's Department learnt nothing from previous health scares? Does he not recognise that saying that a product is safe while at the same time introducing precautionary measures sends a confused and confusing message, which does nothing to maintain or restore public confidence?

Mr. Hogg: But if I could turn that question on its head, is my hon. Friend recommending that I disregard a positive recommendation from SEAC?

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Could we return to the science of the matter? When Professor Pattison of SEAC and Dr. Will of the neuropathogens unit at the Western general hospital in Edinburgh addressed the parliamentary and scientific committee some three weeks ago, they gave the impression that the French work had not been made available to them. In the past three weeks, have our scientists looked at the basis on which the French results were achieved, and what is the state of co-operation among scientists?

Mr. Hogg: The co-operation has been very good. At a recent meeting of SEAC, a number of French scientists from the Dormont committee were present, and I believe that at one of the recent meetings of the Dormont committee, members of SEAC were present. I have also had a recent meeting with the French Agriculture Minister to discuss this very subject.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the great British public are getting pretty fed up with all the scare stories affecting their staple food of one sort or another? Is he further aware that one of the largest abattoirs in the country is in my constituency? As my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) and other hon. Members have said, abattoirs are affected by such scare stories. Will my right hon. and learned Friend undertake to assure people today that lamb is as safe as it has ever been, so that we can enjoy our summer holidays in peace and quiet and ensure that butchers, abattoirs, retailers and anyone else involved in the industry can sleep easy at night?

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend has stated the position with complete accuracy. In my view, UK lamb and, indeed, European lamb is wholly safe. What is being done is done out of an abundance of caution, based on assessments of theoretical risk. There is absolutely no evidence of any kind that BSE is in the national flock, either here or elsewhere in Europe.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is the Minister aware that the opinion is going around in my constituency that his mere appearance on television is enough to undermine confidence in whichever product he is proclaiming to be safe? Will he confirm whether it is correct that there are about 170,000 cases of BSE in beef herds, so the Government have taken some precautions—belatedly and poorly enforced, but now in place—and that, although there is no evidence whatever of any BSE infection in the sheep flock, we are taking similar precautions for sheep? In the absence of such evidence, does not such action strike the Minister as somewhat drastic? Have we not reached an incredible state of affairs when Professor Richard Lacey is accusing the Ministry and the European Commission of alarmism?

Mr. Hogg: I do not know what impact I may have on the hon. Gentleman's constituents, but I know of the impact that he has on mine. He is against the integrity of the United Kingdom, which causes immense dismay in most of England and Wales, and I fancy in Scotland as well.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): May I encourage the Minister to look on the bright side? There is one. First, thousands of sheep and cattle are happily munching grass instead of heading towards the abattoir or the dinner plate.

Mr. Home Robertson: They are going to incinerators.

Mr. Banks: Not all of them, yet.

[Mr. Banks]

Secondly, thousands of people are becoming vegetarians because they do not want their brains to turn to jelly, and that must be good for the health of the nation. Thirdly, the House has watched the interesting spectacle of the Minister becoming the first hog to make a pig's ear out of himself.

Mr. Hogg: It is obviously for the hon. Gentleman to determine whether he is a vegetarian, but the consequence of what he has just said would be disastrous for British farmers and everybody working in the related industries.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Is the Minister aware that I represent a large number of producers as well as consumers, and although I agree with him and my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) that it is right to err on the side of caution, it is also important not to cause panic? Will he or one of his Ministers have a quick word with the Consumers Association, to ensure that it does not make the same kind of foolish statement that it made over the beef crisis?

Mr. Hogg: It is always nice to have the hon. Gentleman's support. He had better have some cautionary words with the hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks), because his constituents would be damaged by his hon. Friend's policies. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has the matter concerning the Consumers Association in hand.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Does the Minister accept that the key lesson to learn from the BSE crisis is the need to engage and hold consumer confidence? Does he understand that many people view his Ministry as an agent of the producer rather than of the consumer? Is there not a case for an independent food advisory committee?

Mr. Hogg: Of course, it is important to try to engage and retain the confidence of the consumer—that is central. I do not, however, agree with the hon. Gentleman's conclusion. It is perfectly true that the Ministry of Agriculture has always had a high regard for the interests of the producer, and rightly so. But our paramount obligation and duty is not to the producer: it is to the consumer. My Department's overriding obligation is to ensure the safety and quality of British food.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Will the Minister assure the House that the Department's secret priority is not the promotion of ostrich farming?

Mr. Hogg: That issue has never crossed my desk.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): Scrapie in sheep was made a notifiable disease in 1992. Has the incidence of scrapie increased since then? Is there not a case, as the president of the Royal Society makes clear in his press statement today, for the Government to explore the possibility of a programme to eradicate scrapie in sheep?

Mr. Hogg: Yes, there is. We must clearly develop a strategy designed to achieve, in the medium to long term, the eradication of scrapie from the national flock. Meanwhile, we need to determine whether our existing scrapie controls and regulations are adequate. I propose to direct that that be done. We also need to carry out research to determine, as best we can, the present incidence of scrapie in the national flock.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Is the Minister aware that I spent several hours over the Whit weekend assisting a farmer because the Intervention Board's telephone service was unmanned for the whole holiday period? Given the Government's failure to respond to inquiries that I have initiated, will the Minister assure the House that every possible support will be given to farmers with inquiries about his statement—over the telephone and by other means—during the coming holiday period? Will he also use such services as a way of collecting data from farmers, to assist with the important research that is necessary?

Mr. Hogg: We have greatly improved the communication policies that we have been pursuing. It is important to do our utmost to keep the producers informed. We have established helplines; we have been writing direct to farmers. We have been issuing newsletters and publishing advertisements in the farming press. We shall certainly see how we can reinforce that approach.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I welcome the right hon. and learned Gentleman's statement. May I emphasise to him the massive size of the Welsh flock? Were anything like what has happened to beef to happen to sheepmeat in Wales, our rural communities would face ruin.

Where are Welsh Office Ministers today? What discussions has the Minister had with them to safeguard our industry?

Mr. Hogg: My understanding is that the relevant Welsh Office Minister is at the Welsh show, which is where I expect the hon. Gentleman would want him to be.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Does the Minister accept that many sheep producers in constituencies such as mine work in the most marginal agricultural areas and are already right up to the wire, financially speaking—not least because of the erosion of Government support for those areas, particularly in the form of hill livestock compensatory allowances? If they are to suffer losses from a slump in market confidence, will the Minister reassure us that, in so far as it is within the power of the Government to do so, they will adjust the various forms of agricultural support so that, for once, hill farmers in marginal areas will be given a decent deal?

Mr. Hogg: The truth is that all these things depend on consumer confidence. My own clear feeling is that there is absolutely no reason why consumers' confidence in lamb should be damaged by what has been said here today or at the Agriculture Council.

Point of Order

4.9 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Yesterday, the Prime Minister told the House:

"No one can buy access to Ministers."—[*Official Report*, 23 July 1996; Vol. 282, c. 144.]

Yet the introduction to a leaflet from the Conservative party's Premier club states:

"The Premier Club is also a forum for leading businessmen to meet and interact, and to forge closer relationships with senior Conservative politicians."

Those senior politicians are, of course, Ministers. Do you believe that that issue ought to be referred to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, so that we can prevent Ministers from touting themselves around for money in that way?

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Lady feels that that is a matter for the Commissioner, she must refer it. I remind the House that we will have a debate later today on the code of conduct, during which that matter may arise.

BILL PRESENTED

REGULATION OF THE WHEELCLAMPING INDUSTRY

Mrs. Diana Maddock, supported by Mr. David Atkinson, Ms Glenda Jackson, Mr. A. J. Beith, Mr. Gary Waller, Mr. Bruce George, Mr. Alex Carlile, Mr. Peter Thurnham, Mr. Alan Simpson, Mr. David Rendel, Mr. Paul Flynn and Mr. Matthew Taylor, presented a Bill to make provision for the licensing of private wheelclamp operators by local authorities and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Wednesday 16 October and to be printed. [Bill 188.]

Union Flag

4.12 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to facilitate and promote the flying of the Union Flag; to enable Government construction projects to be identified with the Union Flag; and to promote the union of the United Kingdom.

Sunday was a gorgeous day, and I sat in my garden in Lichfield reading *The Sunday Times*, as my favourite newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Times* were not available that day. I started looking through the newspaper's magazine, where I saw an interesting piece called "Britain's feel-bad factor".

The article stated that *The Sunday Times* had commissioned an NOP poll for the magazine, which showed that

"people are either unaware of, or unwilling to believe in, Britain's achievements."

The article stated:

"Measured in terms of gross domestic product, Britain vies for fifth place . . . in the world rankings. But most people think that Britain's economy is far less important . . . Only 22 per cent. correctly plumped for the fifth biggest."

The article continued:

"Only 27 per cent. think Britain has a lower unemployment rate than Germany, France and Sweden . . . But unemployment in Britain is only 7.7 per cent. of the workforce, compared with 9 per cent. in Germany, 9.3 per cent. in Sweden and 12.3 per cent. in France."

On taxes, the article stated:

"46 per cent. think they are higher in Britain than in other industrial countries . . . Overall, taxes in Britain are 38 per cent. of GDP, compared with an average of 45 per cent. in the EU."

Only in two areas was there a little optimism.

"By more than two to one . . . people believe British television to be the best in the world. Given the choice between identically priced British, German and Japanese goods, 72 per cent. said they would choose the domestic product."

The article, written by David Smith—

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Much against my better judgment, I have been listening to the hon. Member for Mid–Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant), and not once has he mentioned the subject of his Bill—the Union flag. All he has said is totally irrelevant to the Bill that he is purporting to introduce.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member's introduction has been quite long, but he may now be coming to the flag. Is that right?

Mr. Fabricant: Precisely.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is wearing the right colours today.

Mr. Fabricant: The point is that the final sentence of the article states:

"Underneath that inferiority complex, there may just be a sense of national pride waiting to burst out."

Madam Speaker, that is the whole point of my Bill.

[Mr. Fabricant]

Thanks to Gordon on the Opposition Front Bench, we have become a nation of gloom—new Labour, new glums. I want to bring a little colour back to the United Kingdom. I want to fly the red, white and blue. About 3 million Britons go to America every year, and they see the stars and stripes flying in petrol station forecourts, outside people's homes, outside schools and on public buildings. But we do not see our flag flying here.

Why is that? First, it is due to planning permission, and my Bill will seek to change planning permission measures. To fly a flag, one needs a flagpole, and—astonishingly enough—one needs planning permission for that. My Bill will seek to ensure that—providing it is to fly the British flag—planning permission will not be necessary for a flagpole.

Secondly, during my researches, I found that, amazingly, Government buildings are allowed to fly the flag on only 20 days in a year, and on extra special days as specified by the Queen through the Lord Chamberlain. My Bill would allow—nay, would encourage—Government buildings to fly it 365 days a year. I would like it to be flown in schools, outside petrol forecourts, in people's front gardens and in offices. We should be proud of the Union.

I have had letters of encouragement from people from all parts of the country. Mr. Egerton, of Dinas Powys in the Vale of Glamorgan, wrote:

"I fly the union flag (a small one) on the apex of my greenhouse—and regularly receive appreciative remarks."

Roger Percival, of the Pheasant hotel in Kelling, Norfolk, writes:

"I urged the British Tourist Authority/English Tourist Board to encourage all members to fly the Union Flag."

Christopher Buswell of Alton in Hampshire says:

"Could not the British be encouraged to erect flagpoles at their homes and fly the Union flag thus instilling a sense of national pride in their country once again?"

Mrs. Woolley, of Cardiff, South Glamorgan, writes:

"I have just returned from a holiday in the West and to see the flags of Canada and America so proudly displayed in almost every garden and on public buildings made me ashamed for the way in which we are fettered by planning restrictions and days for flying the flag."

I could go on—*[Interruption.]*—and I will, as Opposition Members implore me to. Mr. Edward Johnson, from Falmouth in Cornwall, writes:

"I personally feel that the history of our flag and its presence, should be compulsory at every school in Britain."

We have every right to be proud of the flag. I would also like Government construction projects to fly the British flag, just as European Union projects in the United Kingdom show the European flag.

This Bill is not only about patriotism; it is about taking the flag away from the National Front and the fascists, who more or less possessed it in the 1960s and 1970s. The Bill gives the flag back to the people. The greatest threat it faces comes not from anyone who might be unpatriotic enough to oppose it today, but from a Labour Government.

Madam Speaker, I can see you asking me why that should be so. It is Labour policy to promote devolution. Devolution would light the long fuse that would inevitably lead to the break-up of the UK. That would be damaging, because, great as England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are, they are made all the greater because we are one nation—the United Kingdom. That would be threatened by a Labour Government.

A Labour Government would give up all our powers of veto in Europe. The Union flag would become the white flag of surrender. For that reason, the Bill not only promotes a flag to be flown from a flagpole, but is a reminder to everyone that the Conservative party and the Government stand for the great union that is the Union of the United Kingdom.

The greatest son of Lichfield is Samuel Johnson, who said:

"Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel."

At the risk of deselection, I shall disagree with him and say that there is nothing wrong with patriotism, which is devotion to one's country. Nationalism may be different. The Union Flag Bill promotes the Union and the flying of the flag. I hope that all patriots in the Chamber today will support it.

4.19 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): I do not support the Bill, but I like the hon. Member for Mid–Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant)—how could anyone dislike him? It is not the Labour party that is a threat to the hon. Gentleman's Bill, if he gets permission for it, but time and sanity. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on becoming a Parliamentary Private Secretary, which is a humble but worthy job. It is the first greasy mark on the political pole, and we would all agree that few have greased more assiduously, or carried a ministerial lunch box with more colour and verve, than the hon. Member for Mid–Staffordshire.

There is a certain guile about the hon. Gentleman that neutralises his propensity to kiss the bottom of any passing figure of authority. He is visibly bursting with pride at becoming a ministerial gofer, which makes me rather sad. I do not see a Minister manque sitting opposite but a poor, wretched youth congratulating himself on getting the last cabin boy's job on the Titanic.

For all the qualities of the hon. Member for Mid–Staffordshire—and we all like him—his proposal is silly, as one would expect from its originator. It is silly in concept and timing. After all, the hon. Gentleman only has the overspill of a few days in October to present his Bill, if he gets permission. The chances of the Bill ever getting to the statute book are about as good as my chances of entering the kingdom of heaven.

Mr. Foulkes: Or the shadow Cabinet.

Mr. Banks: Yes, or the shadow Cabinet—which I have been assured by the Leader of the Opposition is one and the same place. If it is the same place, I have a good idea what God looks like.

The suggestion to fly more flags comes straight out of Evelyn Waugh, and so does the hon. Member for Mid–Staffordshire. Wrapping the Union flag around bankrupt policies or unfavourable Government opinion polls is typical of the Conservative party. It does that all the time, to cover its bankruptcy. Every time Opposition Members criticise the Government about their economic

performance, or whatever, they say that we are being unpatriotic and talking Britain down. The Government are running Britain down, when all we are doing is telling the truth.

The hon. Member for Mid–Staffordshire mentioned the great Samuel Johnson. Apart from Lichfield, I can think of one other similarity between Dr. Johnson and the hon. Gentleman, but kindness prevents me from saying precisely what it is.

Waving more flags is a pathetic response, but one expects that from a pathetic Government. It is obscene to use the flag as a way of suggesting that criticism of a policy or Government is tantamount to treason, and divides the country rather than unites it. The hon. Member said that the Union flag should be flown over Government construction projects. I would like him to name a few. There are plenty of flags flying over British manufacturing industry. Unfortunately, they tend to be the national flags of Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and Germany.

The hon. Gentleman is also using his Bill as a way of getting at devolution. There is much talk in the House about subsidiarity. Devolution is subsidiarity—national subsidiarity. A flag should be a symbol of national unity, not used to paper over injustices and divisions that should be addressed. I often visit the United States, and it is true that one sees that country's flag everywhere. America is more united in that respect, because so many powers have been devolved to individual states, which also have their own flags.

The hon. Gentleman's Bill is a silly proposal, but at least Mr. Simon Hoggart now has some more cheap copy for tomorrow, in his love-hate relationship with the hon. Member for Mid–Staffordshire.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and negatived.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Social Security

That the draft Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) Amendment Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 16th July, be approved.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

Wild Animals: Trapping Methods

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 4198/96, relating to methods of trapping wild animals; shares the Government's concern that the Commission's proposals represent a significant weakening of the existing Council regulation agreed unanimously in 1991; and supports the Government's view that the Community must make it clear to fur-exporting countries through Community legislation that it maintains a strong commitment to end the use of legbold traps worldwide.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

Fisheries

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 7833/96, relating to management guidelines for the fourth generation of Multi-Annual Guidance Programmes, 7827/96 on restructuring the Community fisheries sector, and 7701/96, relating to the establishment of a satellite-based vessel monitoring system; and the unnumbered Explanatory Memoranda submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 8th July 1996 laying down technical measures for the conservation of fishery resources; on 6th July 1996 on a fisheries agreement between the European Community and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania; on 8th July 1996 on a fisheries agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Angola; on 8th July 1996 on a fisheries agreement between the European Community and Sao Tome e Principe; and on 9th July 1996 on progress of the Multi-Annual Guidance Programme for the fishing fleet at the end of 1995; and supports the Government's resolve to achieve improvements in the Common Fisheries Policy, in particular in relation to the conservation and rational exploitation of the resources on which United Kingdom fishermen depend, and the Government's commitment to seeking Treaty changes at the Inter-Governmental Conference in order to address the issue of quota hopping.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Amendment proposed: at the end of the Question, to add—

'and calls on Her Majesty's Government to recognise and draw to the attention of other Member States of the European Community that the genesis and evolution of the current Common Fisheries Policy is flawed by past misrepresentation, coercion by qualified majority vote, inequity between Member States, and impracticality in operation, and is thus incapable of achieving the objectives of conservation of fisheries and the marine environment that can yield sustainable catches and consequent stability of income and employment in fishing communities; and thus believes that these objectives can only be achieved by a new policy created and sustained by mutual agreement between those Member States possessing internationally recognised fishery interests working in co-operation to achieve these universally desirable ends.'.—*[Mr. Spearing.]*

Question, That the amendment be made, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102 (European Standing Committees)*:—

The House divided: Ayes 33, Noes 164.

Division No. 211] **[4.27 pm**

AYES

Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Beith, A J
Bennett, Andrew F
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Chidgey, David
Cohen, Harry
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gill, Christopher
Hardy, Peter
Hawksley, Warren
Kirkwood, Archy
Lynne, Ms Liz
Mackinlay, Andrew
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Molyneaux, Sir James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Sir David
Taylor, John D *(Strangf'd)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Dr. Norman A. Godman.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes

Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butler, Peter
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, John
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Rathbone, Tim
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Richard Ottaway.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Point of Order

4.38 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This afternoon, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food published a Fisheries Review Group document. I found two reference copies of it in the Library, but no copies for hon. Members in the Vote Office. The document is substantial, and does not easily photocopy.

It is infuriating for hon. Members with fishing constituencies, who have been waiting for this document for many months, to find that it has been published on the last day of the Session and in a manner that makes it extremely inconvenient and difficult to consult. As MAFF Ministers are on the Front Bench, may I use your good offices, Madam Deputy Speaker, to ask whether they are prepared to extend some common courtesy to hon. Members?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I shall cause inquiries to be made. I have no prior knowledge of the matter.

Orders of the Day

EDUCATION BILL *[LORDS]*

Read a Second time.

Motion made and Question put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order, That the Bill be not committed.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question agreed to.

Read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

SCHOOL INSPECTIONS BILL *[LORDS]*

Read a Second time.

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): Madam Deputy Speaker, may I just say one word?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I am sorry, but no debate is possible under the Standing Order arrangements.

Motion made and Question put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order, That the Bill be not committed.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question agreed to.

Read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

DEER (SCOTLAND) BILL *[LORDS]*

Read a Second time.

Motion made and Question put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order, That the Bill be not committed.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question agreed to.

Read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

Accelerated Slaughter Programme

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

4.41 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg): This will be a short debate, and I know that many hon. Members have points that they wish to make. Therefore, I shall keep my remarks brief, and focus on the issues of most immediate importance.

I shall deal first with the selective cull. As hon. Members know, the agreement that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister secured at the Florence Council provides the framework for the step-by-step lifting of the European Union ban on exports of United Kingdom beef and beef products. Decisions on each step will be taken on the basis of scientific and objective criteria. The agreement was a great success, and provides a solid way forward. The framework also provides for the introduction by the United Kingdom of a programme for accelerating the decline of bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

As I have stated frequently, the Government are committed to a policy of eradicating BSE—it is a high policy objective. We are pursuing that objective successfully. I am glad to report that the number of confirmed cases is in sharp decline. To date, there have been about 160,000 confirmed cases. The peak was in 1992, when we had about 36,500 confirmed cases. By 1995, that had fallen to about 14,000 confirmed cases. This year, leaving aside any question of a cull, we expect about 8,000 confirmed cases. That figure will fall to about 2,800 confirmed cases by 1998. As the House will see, we are steadily eradicating BSE from our national herd.

On 3 July, we issued a consultation document on our selective slaughter programme which is designed to increase the rate of decline still further. The aim of the programme is to identify, slaughter and destroy those animals that, on objective grounds, can reasonably be regarded as most likely to have been exposed to the risk of infection, and thus to develop BSE.

There has been much talk—in the House and elsewhere—about the cull of hundreds of thousands of animals and about whole-herd slaughter. Neither is true. The programme will be carefully targeted, focusing on certain individual animals born in 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93. As hon. Members know, for animals born in 1989-90, the slaughter will be voluntary.

There have been many responses to our consultation document. In addition, my hon. Friends the Minister of State and the Parliamentary Secretaries to the Ministry of Agriculture, with Ministers in other Agriculture Departments, have held many meetings with farmers throughout the country to hear local views at first hand. Many views have been expressed to us on such details as what we mean by a cohort, the definition of a herd and the right to make representations against the requirement to slaughter.

All those responses are still being considered. I am determined that our final conclusions should reflect as many of the concerns as possible. It is our intention that, in carrying out this policy—which I recognise is a difficult one for many people—we should be as sensitive as we can to the individual problems of every farm.

In this respect, I should say that I am especially aware of the anxieties of dairy farmers about the possible implications for milk quota management. I am pleased to announce that, last night, I was able to secure an important concession from Commissioner Fischler at the Agriculture Council. Subject to certain conditions, United Kingdom farmers who are affected by our programme will be able to lease out surplus milk quota after the end of the calendar year. That should provide welcome flexibility for those concerned.

Taking into account all the relevant considerations, I have concluded that, although it is right that the House should now have the opportunity to debate the programme, it would not be right for me to sign the orders. I did, however, think that it would help hon. Members if they could read copies of the present drafts of the orders, which are now available in the Vote Office. Before signing them, Ministers will take into account the responses to our consultation paper, the views expressed in the House, and any other relevant material.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): I appreciate that my right hon. and learned Friend made a long statement earlier and that he is discussing the important matter of mass slaughter, but, before we get to that mass slaughter, we must deal with the fact that all sorts of farmers throughout this country are facing delays in getting their cattle slaughtered in ones and twos.

They seem to hint that, were they to deal with dealers rather than directly with slaughterhouses, there would be some accelerated progress. My right hon. and learned Friend will have read that I have said the same thing in the House before. Will he encourage his civil servants and his Ministers to ensure that we get the tidying-up process before we enter into the great programme that he is proposing?

Mr. Hogg: I am conscious of the concerns that have been expressed—for example, by my hon. Friend. I am glad that the slaughter policy under the 30-month rule is proceeding effectively—in many ways, thanks to my hon. Friend the Minister of State. We have slaughtered around 280,000 beasts thus far under the 30-month rule. It is difficult to be wholly certain when we will eliminate the backlog, but I hope that that will happen around the middle of October. I certainly understand that it would be desirable either to complete, or at least nearly to complete, the backlog before embarking on the selective cull.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): As the Minister rightly says, the accelerated slaughter scheme is not welcomed by the producers, who are entering into it reluctantly—it is causing them stress and disturbance. Beef producers in Scotland have made it clear to me that they are willing to go along with the scheme, albeit reluctantly, on the clear understanding that the beef ban will be lifted. The Minister has constantly said that the framework is there for lifting the ban.

I have looked carefully, but I cannot find any guarantee or clear indication that the ban will be lifted if we go ahead with the scheme. Will the Minister spell out how it was made clear in the agreement reached in the Council of Ministers that, if the scheme goes ahead, the ban will be lifted?

Mr. Hogg: The framework agreement works as follows: the British Government must fulfil certain obligations, most notably, putting in place the legislation on the selective cull, but also putting in place the requirements regarding the recall of feed and measures involving the identification and traceability of beasts. I shall come to those points later.

When we believe that we have concluded that process, we shall present the Commission with a paper setting out what we have done. The Commission will doubtless wish to verify that we have done that which we have said we have done. We shall then look to the Commission to bring forward proposals for the step-by-step lifting of the ban. The framework identifies a number of steps that we think should be taken before the ban is entirely lifted. I think that the first steps that are likely to be taken involve certified herds—a point that I shall touch on.

For those purposes, the most important thing in the framework agreement, which has been signed up to by all the Heads of State, is a recognition that the Commission and its various instruments, such as the Standing Veterinary Committee, should proceed on scientific and objective criteria, not with regard to any other considerations, as some people might feel that they have hitherto done.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Would this be an appropriate time to ask whether my right hon. and learned Friend will be saying something about the position of cattle that have been sold under the age of 30 months where there has been a substantial loss on the transaction? Is my right hon. and learned Friend attracted to the proposition that the £29.6 million provided by Europe should be applied entirely to help that sector? Can he say something about whether there might be matching funding to provide genuine compensation for the difference in respect of market values?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend raises an important point, but perhaps he will forgive me if I respond to it in the course of my speech, as I have something specific to say on it.

Mr. Paul Marland (West Gloucestershire): On the subject of clearing the backlog, there has been some discussion about bringing into play some cold storage, so that animals that have been slaughtered can be stored in a cold store until the rendering capacity is available to treat the carcases. What is the current position on that?

Mr. Hogg: We have plans to bring on stream additional cold storage facilities. It is that fact which, at least in part, enables me to say that I hope that we shall clear the backlog by around the middle of October. It is important to have additional storage capacity, because we must render some parts of all beasts that are killed under the slaughter scheme.

I have already told the House—I hope that it is helpful to hon. Members—that copies of the draft orders are in the Vote Office. There are some further points that I think hon. Members would like to know. Ministers are likely to sign the relevant orders during the next few weeks—that is not absolutely certain, but likely. That would allow us to start the process of tracing animals in the way set out in the consultation paper and, where appropriate, to apply restriction orders.

There are also a number of questions to which the farming community is anxious to have answers—most notably, compensation. The Government have recognised the need for fair compensation, going beyond our practice for disease control measures.

There will not always be a ready market in the older animals that are slaughtered. Consequently, farmers will have to go out and replace an animal that is slaughtered with a younger animal, which is likely to be more expensive. We have also to take into account taxpayers' interests, however, and it would not be right for farmers to benefit by improving the quality of their herds at taxpayers' expense. Thus, we must strike a balance.

We have decided that, in the case of female animals, we will pay compensation at a value of 90 per cent. of the cost of a younger animal—in other words, 90 per cent. of replacement value—or market value, whichever is higher.

We have also recognised the need for additional compensation for farmers whose herds are most affected. Hon. Members will see our detailed proposals on this matter in paragraph 13 of the consultation document.

I recognise also that, within the farming community, there is grave anxiety about the prospect of a compulsory slaughter of healthy animals. Therefore, I repeat the assurance that I gave the House on 18 July: there will be no compulsory slaughter under this scheme unless the House has had an opportunity to debate the relevant order.

That assurance is subject to one qualification. Separate legislation applies in Northern Ireland, and farming organisations there strongly favour an early cull. Therefore, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland may proceed with slaughter in Northern Ireland in advance of any debate in the autumn. However, we will not proceed to a compulsory slaughter in Great Britain on that basis.

Sir Colin Shepherd (Hereford): My right hon. and learned Friend has set out the Government's position as stated in the consultation document. As he will be aware, both the Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union took issue with increased compensation for farmers whose herds have been more affected. I should be grateful if he would amplify on that matter, rather than making his rather bald statement about securing a balance. Why does he feel that that balance is correct?

Mr. Hogg: There are two elements in the compensation. First, there is compensation for the beef itself. On that, I reiterate what I have said already: compensation for female animals will reflect 90 per cent. of replacement value or market value, whichever is highest. The justification for a 90 per cent. rather than a 100 per cent. replacement value is that, inevitably, farmers will replace an older beast—as, by definition, it will be—with a younger beast. There is a degree of betterment to that.

It is perfectly fair for my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Sir C. Shepherd) to say, "This obligation has been cast on the farmer by the Government." However, we have tried to deal with the concerns both of taxpayers and of the farming community, by saying that 90 per cent. of replacement value or market value, whichever is highest, will take account of the balance that must be struck.

[Mr. Hogg]

The second element in the compensation relates to the disruption that is caused. When one takes out cattle from a herd, one inevitably disrupts a farmer's business. My hon. Friend the Member for Hereford will see, in paragraph 13 of the consultation paper, the measures by which we deal with that matter. In very broad terms, they are as follows. If 10 per cent. of a herd is culled, there will be a 10 per cent. supplement on the value of an individual beast. The supplement will increase in a linear progression, so that there will be a 25 per cent. supplement if 40 per cent. of a herd is culled. I should say that the supplement is subject to a cap, which is explained in paragraph 13 of the consultation document.

It might be helpful if I give the House some information on several related matters. Under the over-30-month scheme, we have now slaughtered rather more than 270,000 beasts, and we are, as I have said, on course for clearing the backlog by mid-October. We would wish to complete, or nearly complete, this process before embarking on the mandatory selective cull.

I attach considerable importance to making speedy progress on our schemes for herds, or animals, which can properly be said never to have been exposed to the risk of developing BSE.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Hogg: I must make a little progress; I shall then certainly give way to my hon. Friend.

We are making excellent progress on the concept of the certified herd. We have discussed the scheme with the Commission, which has raised no objections. We hope to start the process of certifying herds by mid-August. This will provide an exception to the 30-month rule so far as the UK domestic market is concerned, and I would hope to be able to press for an early relaxation of the ban on beef exports in respect of the certified herds.

Mr. Jackson: I greatly welcome what my right hon. and learned Friend has said about the passporting scheme. Does he agree that it must be a high priority, as it is the key to providing a watertight guarantee to consumers at home, in Europe and elsewhere?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Easy identification of animals and their traceability are key elements in restoring the confidence of consumers and our EU partners. The UK has in fact for a number of years had a system which identifies each animal individually, and enables us to trace it back to its herd of origin, but we are improving and reinforcing that system.

Every bovine animal born in Great Britain after 1 July has to have a cattle passport recording all its movements. We are moving as rapidly as we can to a fully computer-based movement recording system. These are the types of development that my hon. Friend would urge on us.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): The Minister is talking about clearing the backlog by mid-October. A number of my constituents—farmers and cattle dealers—have mentioned the fact that dealers are not considered as collection centres. Slaughterhouses are informing these dealers that they cannot take the beasts they have, or their customers' beasts—the farmers' beasts—because slaughterhouses have to take 75 per cent. of their throughput from collection centres.

Farmers are being told by auctioneers with whom they have never traded that they—the auctioneers—must refuse to take their beasts into their collection centres. Will the Minister explain why he has stipulated that slaughterhouses must take 75 per cent. of their throughput from collection centres?

Mr. Hogg: It reflects the pattern of the previous trade, but we are trying to secure a higher throughput through the live marts in order to bring about a slight skew in the system. Some discussions are taking place, especially with my hon. Friend the Minister of State, to try to ensure that live marts are getting a higher proportion of the clean cattle than is currently the case.

I deal now with the question of feed. As the House will know, our view is that ruminant protein in cattle rations is the historic, and by far the most important, cause of BSE. Acting on feed is therefore the key to eradicating BSE. I will not repeat again the various measures that we have taken since 1988 to control the feed given to UK farm animals. I would, however, remind the House of the steps that we are taking this month—at Government expense—to collect and dispose of any supplies of meat and bonemeal still on farms or in feedmills.

From 1 August, it will be an offence to possess such material. I assure the House that we shall be vigorous in our enforcement of this very important provision. The provisions now in place should prevent any risk of ruminants being fed cattle rations that contain any mammalian protein.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): On a point of information, what is the position on the continent in terms of animal feed? The general population has learned an awful lesson about the feeding of animal protein to cattle and sheep which are herbivores. Is that still the practice in other European countries?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is right. The regimes of some countries on the mainland of Europe have been much less satisfactory as regards the use of mammalian protein being fed to farm animals than has been the case here for many years. However, controls have been tightened, and the Commissioner himself intends to make new proposals in that regard. As the hon. Gentleman suggests, it is important that the requirement is EU-wide in its application.

My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) asked about support. We have introduced a range of measures to safeguard the future of the key links in the chain. My hon. Friend will remember that the Agriculture Council in June agreed a range of EU assistance worth about £110 million for beef farmers. Of that, about £29 million, or 34 mecu, was available as a discretionary spend. I am announcing by written answer today how we propose to spend this.

In substance, we will be using the £29 million to pay a headage payment in respect of cattle sold for slaughter between 20 March and 30 June—provided, of course, that the necessary documents can be produced. We have thereby gone a long way towards meeting the wishes of the farming community and its representatives, so as to ensure that the money gets quickly into the pockets of those who have suffered most.

To make it plain, £29 million of the £110 million will be used as I have just described, and the balance will be loaded on to the premium. However, it is not our intention to introduce national aids.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick–upon–Tweed): I sympathise with the Minister's losing his voice. Although his announcement will be some consolation and help to producers who sold at a significant loss earlier this year, what can he say to those who produce suckler calves on the hills and who are contemplating the autumn calf sales with great anxiety, because they cannot afford the fodder to keep those animals throughout the winter months?

Mr. Hogg: The real honest answer is that consumer confidence has to be built up. The market price is the only way to bring about permanent financial assistance or resources to the sector of the farming community that we are debating. We do not have it in mind to introduce a further top-up scheme; nor are there currently any proposals for such a scheme.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: No, I cannot give way. I must make progress.

I have to tell the right hon. Gentleman that, essentially, the solution lies in the market. We need to ensure that market confidence is restored.

On many occasions since 20 March, the House has had an opportunity to discuss BSE and how we can best respond to the grave difficulties that we all face. It is for that reason—the fact that we have been here before—that I have not thought it necessary to go into overmuch detail, but have focused on those matters which are of most immediate concern.

In closing, I should like to pay tribute to the good sense and patience of the farming community and of those who represent it. I have been deeply impressed by the courage and dignity with which those engaged in agriculture and in related industries have met these quite exceptional and most challenging of times. They have our support.

Indeed, I believe that only a Conservative Government would have had the will to commit such vast resources to the assistance of British agriculture. We have thereby given powerful and conclusive evidence of the importance that we attach to this vital sector of the British economy.

Sir Mark Lennox–Boyd (Morecambe and Lunesdale): Before my right hon. and learned Friend sits down, will he give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I rather thought that the Minister had already sat down.

Mr. Hogg: I was making my final observation, and I give way to my hon. Friend

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. and learned Friend is most kind. I know that he mentioned the cold storage scheme, but unfortunately I had to attend to an urgent matter outside.

Let me briefly draw to his attention a point about the north-west and Lancaster in particular. Although it is a small market, there is a great backlog of 2,700 cattle awaiting slaughter. That figure will increase dramatically in the autumn, and there could well be animal welfare problems. That makes it so important that an adequate cold storage scheme is provided in the north-west. I should say to my right hon. Friend that there is a belief—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but interventions should be brief, and this is an one-and-a-half-hour debate.

Mr. Hogg: I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs has been to Preston to discuss exactly the point that my hon. Friend has raised. Our objective is to ensure that the 30-month scheme operates as effectively as possible. There are rather more than 40 abattoirs operating in England and Wales.

It is important to match abattoirs to renderers to make the scheme as effective as possible, but the cold storage facilities are also important, and I hope that bringing together all the additional facilities will enable us to clear the backlog by about the middle of October. Meanwhile, I shall certainly take account of the point that my hon. Friend has just raised.

5.10 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): It seems appropriate that we should debate BSE on the day that the House rises. The matter has rightly preoccupied hon. Members for many months, and it has been the subject of several debates.

The House will be all too aware of the Government's appalling record on BSE since the disease was officially identified in 1986. It is a record of delay in regulating to protect human and animal health from the BSE agent and of dreadful under-enforcement of those regulations.

By May 1989, the Labour party had realised that it was vital to ban cattle offal from human food, to compensate farmers fully for slaughtered BSE cattle, and to ban the export of meat and bonemeal for cattle feed. Six years ago, in 1990, we called for a tagging system for all calves to be introduced in Great Britain. We knew that traceability would be the key to tackling the problem. Indeed, my hon. Friends the Members for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) and for South Shields (Dr. Clark) are on record calling for action, much of which was belatedly taken by the Government.

Had the Conservative Government listened to Labour, the difficulties faced by the beef industry now would be on a far smaller scale.

There is now great resentment—and a lack of confidence among consumers and the beef industry—at the Government's handling of the crisis that followed the statements made on 20 March that BSE was the most likely explanation for an apparently new strain of CJD.

[Dr. Gavin Strang]

The House will remember that on that day the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food stated:

"I do not believe that this information should damage consumer confidence and thus the beef market."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 387.]

The Government had no strategy to cope with the crisis, and our rural areas are paying a heavy price for that misjudgment.

As bits of policy have emerged since the statements of 20 March, they have been dogged by chaos and confusion. Nowhere was that more apparent—nothing had more impact on the industry—than in the introduction of the 30-month slaughter scheme. Only last week, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster admitted on radio that there were still problems with the scheme. At least one Conservative Member has drawn attention to the aspects of the implementation of the scheme that are a matter of great concern to the industry.

There is continued dissatisfaction with the selection of abattoirs involved in the scheme, and in my view it is certainly time to review the level of payments made to slaughterhouses participating in the scheme. There is a general feeling in the industry that the rate paid for slaughtering an animal under the 30-month scheme is exceptionally and unjustifiably high.

On 16 April, the Minister promised that there would be exceptions to the 30-month rule for those herds—especially organic and specialist herds—with no risk of BSE. No such scheme is yet in operation. The Minister addressed the selective slaughter scheme, which is the main item before the House today.

Mr. Marland: We have heard this before from the hon. Gentleman. Before he leaves the section of his speech in which he criticises what is happening in the slaughterhouses, will he tell the House what his party proposes and how Labour would sort out the problem? It is not good enough for him to echo the Irishman and say, "I would not start from here if I were trying to find a way forward." It would be interesting to hear what the Labour party would do.

Dr. Strang: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there is tremendous dissent in the slaughterhouse industry. We recognise that there is overcapacity and that it has created problems. There is a feeling in many of the slaughterhouses and abattoirs not involved in the scheme that those participating in the scheme are achieving high profits and that the scheme is giving them an unfair competitive advantage in a difficult market.

No matter how we embarked on the scheme—we should recall that the Government proposed the 30-month slaughter scheme, albeit in response to the views of the industry; it was not imposed by Europe—it was always going to be a huge logistical operation.

Mr. Marland: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: No. Others are waiting to speak, including the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King).

Mr. Marland *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is clear that the hon. Gentleman is not giving way.

Dr. Strang: I am encouraged by hon. Members on both sides of the House not to give way, so I shall move on fairly quickly.

It is obviously a matter of regret that the orders have not been signed, but hon. Members should have the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

The House will remember that, at first, the selective slaughter scheme was to involve 40,000 cattle. That was the figure that the Minister first mentioned to the House. It was then increased to 80,000. Now, up to 147,000 cattle will be killed under the scheme. After great difficulty, that was agreed with the other member states of the European Union. We are concerned that what we have in return is not adequate. We have no timetable, and no guarantee from our European counterparts of any future agreement on the proposed lifting of the overall ban on the export of our beef and beef products.

The Minister will be aware that there is great concern throughout the industry. Did he agree with the Prime Minister when he said in reply to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition on 4 July that the selective slaughter policy was necessary, "to ensure public health"? I doubt that that can really be the Government's position.

Does the Minister share the Prime Minister's assessment that, by October, we shall be ready for the lifting of the ban on certified herds, young animals and embryos, and that, by November, all the conditions should be met to allow all meat that can be sold in the United Kingdom to be exported?

I remind the House that the agreement that was reached with Europe obliged the Government to get the necessary legislation and administrative provisions into force by 1 August. We are clearly in no position to achieve that.

The farming industry is right to advise the Minister that the cost of replacing an animal slaughtered under the scheme will be greater than its market value. The Minister has provided us with information on compensation. It is fair to say that he has now reached an understanding with the industry in respect of the compensation being offered. There are some considerations as to how we calculate the size of the herd, but hon. Members will recognise that, if we are to implement such a scheme, there must be fair compensation. Indeed, it will be a traumatic time for many producers and dairies. Many of them will be unaware of what lies ahead. Such uncertainty is of great concern to the industry.

I would like to raise a number of points, but time is short. Many of us are repeatedly approached about incineration. What additional incineration facilities are being provided? A huge volume of meat and bonemeal, which is created by renderers after the animals are slaughtered, has to be incinerated. The operation is huge, and we need some assurance that the Government are pressing ahead with it because it causes great controversy in many parts of the country.

It is of deep regret—I make no apology for repeating it—that two thirds of BSE cases being reported are in cattle that were born after the ruminant feed ban was put in place. We know that that ban was not effective. I still believe that there is a very powerful argument for an investigation into whether we can identify the main sources of that contaminated ruminant protein. Where were the cases occurring? Where was the specified bovine offal not being properly kept out? Where were compounders—I think by accident—continuing to supply contaminated ruminant protein? To what extent was there cross-contamination through the use of the same equipment for pig and poultry meal?

I appreciate the Minister's advising the House on how the Government intend to allocate the special additional aid that the EU has given to individual countries. I welcome his decision in this area. There was a feeling in the industry that the Government would allocate it to the beef special premium scheme. It is obviously fairer that the money should go to producers who have lost most and been hit hardest—those who have been selling beef for consumption since the crisis broke on 20 March.

We have a long way to go on this issue. There is a great deal to be learnt, but I am sure that hon. Members share the objective that we must support the industry and all its ancillary aspects as best we can. Of course we do not have an open purse; of course there is a limit to the amount of money that any Government can spend on the matter, but above all we must see our way forward and re-establish our reputation as a country that has some of the healthiest livestock in the world and high quality beef and beef products.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next hon. Member, I should point out that this is a very short debate and I should be grateful if those who are called would speak very briefly.

5.22 pm

Mr. John Biffen (North Shropshire): I welcome the decision of my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister to take part in this debate. I very much appreciate his gesture, given the difficulty that he has with his voice. I believe that the whole House welcomes it; it underlines the importance of this topic to many of our constituencies. I assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I shall try to keep my remarks to the minimum, having regard to the many hon. Members who want to take part in the debate.

The situation that we are considering has some echoes for me, since the 1968 foot and mouth disease originated in my constituency. For many months, I felt that I lived with that topic, excluding all others. One very strong recollection that I have from that occasion was the fashion that developed for saying that the traditional slaughter policy for foot and mouth disease was being overtaken by the magnitude of the disease and that we should be much more sympathetic towards a vaccination policy. The clamour—certainly a representation—was resisted by Mr. Fred Peart, who, as Agriculture Minister, earned my genuine respect. He was a streetwise politician.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Hear, hear.

Mr. Biffen: I see that his son and heir is present. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman represents quite the same robust views on the issues of our time.

Mr. Peart fought his battles with the Treasury, but above all, broadly speaking, he was the master of his own Department. He did not have to go across to Brussels every five or 20 minutes to seek guidance, secure permission, and so on. I am not in any sense being disrespectful to my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister, who has done an extremely good job in these difficult circumstances. Let the House be under no illusion, however, that the world is very different when a Minister must operate within a collective framework rather than carry out departmental policies as could be done in the time of foot and mouth disease.

We are confronted today not by the assertion of the traditional means of countering a disease but by a departure from the traditional means of countering BSE. I agree that the disease is relatively modern, has the most horrifying consequences, and is deeply worrying to the farming industry that wants to preserve a worldwide reputation for animal hygiene. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister has said, although there were difficulties in the early days, which have been well documented, the incidence of BSE fell by 61 per cent. between 1992 and 1995, and that fall is continuing. We are all entitled to ask what should be added to that policy to make it more cost-effective. It is not as though we are bewildered at being confronted by a disease; just the opposite.

What is so important about the accelerated programme and the orders that might be laid in its support is, first, the extent to which we are envisaging the slaughter of cattle that have no visible symptoms of BSE; secondly the slaughter cannot be easily identified as directly assisting the reduction of BSE; and, thirdly, a substantial element of the programme is—presumably—related to the restoration of consumer confidence. All those propositions need to be much more explicit and much more thoroughly argued to secure the House's assent. That is why I think that it would be valuable to return to the subject in the autumn when we know rather more about the factors and the significance attached to them.

Every hon. Member is naturally anxious that our rural communities should be compensated for the losses incurred over BSE, and it is natural that our first thought is of the farming community. The difficulties go much wider. Shropshire county council and the Shropshire training and enterprise council produced a paper on what was thought to be the cost to the community. I advised them to submit it to the Treasury, because it seemed very prudent. We are considering substantial costs. Let there be no doubt whatever that they impact on total public spending and any assumptions of tax reductions. That is why we will want to consider the working of the scheme again to ensure that the financial costs are limited wherever possible. We should reconsider the scale of the slaughter that is so far envisaged where it is questionable that it will have any impact on the reduction, and the rate of reduction, in BSE.

I turn now to parliamentary control over policy. I am very pleased that we are having this debate, that it is on a one-line Whip and that it is low key. I agree with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) that we are all concerned about seeking to support the agriculture industry. We all want to ensure that its interests are secured in equitable terms—and not only in our national community. We also want them to be reasonably effectively represented in the European Union. To that extent, the House must consider how best to make its representations.

I know that my right hon. and learned Friend will be sensitive to anxieties on this point. Criticising the present arrangements does not amount to xenophobia; it simply means, given our history of animal health and welfare, that we are not prepared to throw all that aside and adopt a system that we would never have adopted had we been left to make our own dispositions in reaction to events earlier this year.

This is a challenge to the maturity of the political judgment and political effect of national parliaments in relation to Community decisions. If we do not start getting it right now, we shall be doing no service to our friendship with Europe.

5.29 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): Following one of the comments made by the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Biffen), I might point out that one of the features that I find most unsatisfactory in this programme is the fact that it is incredibly inefficient. Perhaps 98 per cent. of the animals that will be slaughtered do not have BSE. I listened intently to the Minister's opening remarks to hear how these cohorts of animals were to be selected for slaughter under the programme. I heard nothing about that—except that they will be animals from herds that have included cows with BSE. What about a herd of 50 cows in which just one has had BSE? How many of them will be slaughtered? We await the details.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) pointed out, the numbers have grown time and again—from tens of thousands, to 40,000, to 120,000. Now, there are even fears of 200,000 having to be slaughtered. It is rather like losing badly at Monopoly or poker. What is more, the numbers have always seemed arbitrary, and there is no enthusiasm on the part of farmers for the programme.

One of the greatest disappointments of recent times in the BSE story is the fact that no live test for BSE has been developed. We pressed for research into one many years ago. During a recent recess, I spent four or five hours going through the literature that I have accumulated on the development of a test for BSE in live animals. I then wrote a detailed letter to the Ministry of Agriculture—three pages in all—summarising some of the progress and inviting comments. I know that MAFF is hugely overburdened these days, but I did expect better than the six or seven-line reply that included no detailed comment on the research that I had quoted.

The Minister may say that this is unfair, but I detect a certain indifference in MAFF to developing a test for BSE in live animals, even though ultimately that will be the only effective, efficient way of eradicating it. I should like to think that, if the Labour party was in charge of agriculture over the next five or six months, we would launch an intensive effort to develop such a test, so that it would be ready by, at the very latest, December. Based on my knowledge of the subject, I feel sure that such an intensive effort would lead to a test for BSE in live animals by the end of the year.

The global total of animals to be slaughtered during the next 12 months will be 1 million, comprising the 15,000 a week barren cows, the extra numbers under this new programme, and the slaughter of cattle aged more than 30 months—yet only about 10,000 are certified as having BSE. One hundred times as many cows as need to be are being slaughtered. Hence the urgency of finding a test for BSE in live animals.

I was reassured by the Minister's remarks about compensation for farmers in terms of replacement values and market values. The terms seem fair and reasonable. I am pleased also to hear that the £29.5 million from the EC is to be topped up by the Government—

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Wrong.

Mr. Williams: Really?

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The £29 million is not to be topped up. I explained that we were going to use the money to make payments in respect of cattle sold between 20 March and 30 June—but we are not topping it up.

Mr. Williams: In that case I am deeply disappointed. The money is being aimed at the right target, but I can see the force of the representations made to me to the effect that the beef market since 20 March has suffered such a devastating blow that the Government should have provided as much money as the EC is providing.

I want to say something about the fees being paid to abattoirs by the Government. I have been sent a letter—I do not know whether it was circulated to all hon. Members or just to those interested in agriculture—by Sam Morphet, chairman of the Bermans Group of Abattoir Operators. He is severely critical of the selection of abattoirs. There are 256 slaughterhouses in Britain, 41 of which have been allocated work under this scheme—but 19 of them have been allocated 82 per cent. of the work, and they are the largest abattoirs. That is completely unfair.

I find one paragraph of Mr. Morphet's letter staggering:

"payment for the slaughter of cattle under the scheme is being set at the extraordinarily high rate of £107.50 per beast (£87.50 plus the value of the hide which is at least £20). To put this into context a reasonable commercial rate for the job is around £30 including the value of the hide."

I hope that the Minister will, this afternoon, explain to the House and to the people of this country—they are footing the bill—why abattoirs are being paid three times the going rate.

I should like, finally, to mention the environmental implications of the slaughter programme. We hear stories from time to time of severe difficulties encountered in the slaughtering of 1 million head of cattle. First, there is an acute shortage across Britain of rendering capacity. Indeed, in Wales there is not a single rendering plant. I hear, too, that Canterbury Mills plant in Ashford, Kent may be operating in an unsatisfactory way. A few weeks ago, there were stories of aqueous effluent from the plant being poured on to adjacent land, with the consequent danger of prions contaminating that land. The material may even have contaminated water supplies, and it is no coincidence that there is a cluster of CJD cases in that area. That rendering plant has been in operation for many years, and we cannot be so casual in disposal.

Some 800,000 cattle are to be rendered down to meat and bonemeal, but we have no way of disposing of it. It cannot be used in animal feed, and it must be stored. It may end up being dumped as landfill—a solution that I find most unsatisfactory. It would be far better if the material were incinerated, but although there is a problem with incineration capacity, that is the only environmentally acceptable solution. I hope that MAFF will show urgency in that regard. If this is to be an on-going programme for the next five or six years—if 800,000 cattle a year are to be slaughtered—we need to develop incineration capacity so that we can destroy the material and make certain no harm is done to the environment.

5.40 pm

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): In the south-west recently the Prime Minister referred to this crisis as the most difficult problem that he had faced in his 17 years in Parliament, and few who represent rural constituencies would disagree with him. We meet at an acutely worrying time for many farmers, and I very much agree with what my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Biffen) said about the spirit in which this debate must be approached and the way in which the

Government have set it up. This initial debate on the Adjournment will be followed by another opportunity to consider the matter when we return.

I agree with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) that this has been a massive organisational challenge. I have criticised the time that it has taken to get the cull of cattle aged over 30 months under way. Clearly there continue to be problems and there will be more, so vast is the extent of the cull. But my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister should be congratulated on the compensation that he has achieved for farmers, which is fair. The scheme has taken time, as no one has ever managed to complete a quick chat with the Treasury. I recognise also that we are dealing with substantial sums of public money that have a significant impact on the economy. The offer of 90 per cent. of replacement costs is fair, and I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on what I recognise will not have been an easy discussion.

Having said that, I must join my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire in expressing the gravest concerns and some reservations about the policy. I am glad that we are not voting on it tonight, because I am not sure that I would be able to support it. The purpose of the measure—as stated in the consultation document—is to accelerate the decline in the number of BSE cases in the United Kingdom. But my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister confirmed in his speech that BSE is in sharp decline in any case. What will we achieve and what will it cost us to accelerate something that is in sharp decline?

The purpose is not simply to get an export ban lifted from Europe, but to restore confidence in British beef. Perhaps the return of McDonalds to purchasing on the British market and the success of the Meat and Livestock Commission's campaign to eat more mince—I had mince in the House last night, and extremely good it was—may achieve more for British beef than the lifting of the export ban to Europe. I am not sure how big that export market will be, but it may be significant as an indication of confidence.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister may remember that when the measures were first announced some months ago, I said that the lifting of the ban in Europe was desirable, but not at any price. If colleagues consult *Hansard* they will find that phrase. We need to consider this carefully. If the purpose of this very distressing and expensive scheme is mainly to achieve the lifting of the export ban on live cattle to Europe, what confidence can we have that that will be the consequence?

There is distressing news about gelatine and tallow—matters that I thought had been settled. I understand that there is now fresh uncertainty, and that the ban on those products has not yet been lifted. Clearly it would be most unsatisfactory if we were to proceed with the scheme, only to find that we had not achieved our objectives. Practically every day in the newspapers, the scientific journals and the media, we hear of a new scientist who has found a new way of identifying the disease. The hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) referred to the importance of what he regards as the Holy Grail in this matter, the live test.

I do not know what will come forward in the three months between now and October—and three months in the life of this terrible saga is a long time. It is extremely wise of my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister to continue to approach the matter in the way he has. He has tabled a draft order that establishes what the arrangements will be. There was uncertainty in some of the circulars that we received—including, I believe, from the National Farmers Union and the Country Landowners Association—that the draft orders might change the terms of compensation. It would be helpful if my right hon. and learned Friend or the Minister could reassure those concerned that those are the terms of compensation if the cull goes ahead.

Farmers need to know where they will stand, but I believe that it would be right to hold our counsel and take all possible steps to firm up as clearly as we can just how good the undertakings from Europe are. If the framework is there and if the steps are achieved, we need to know that the ban will be lifted. We can then approach this difficult and challenging issue in that knowledge. But at present, I must say clearly to my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister that I am not confident that I shall be voting in support of such a scheme in October.

5.48 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am pleased to follow the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), as I and my Liberal Democrat colleagues share many of his misgivings. This is a very short debate, and the draft orders were available to us only shortly before it began. It is regrettable that we have such little time to consider and debate the orders. If the Under-Secretary cannot respond to my specific questions during the winding-up speech, I hope we will have the benefit of written answers.

First, can we be given the latest date for the start of the accelerated slaughter scheme? From what the Minister said, it sounds as if that is directly dependent on the completion of the removal of the backlog of the 30-month cattle disposal scheme. If so, a considerable acceleration of that scheme is needed. As has been said in previous debates, and again tonight, there is a considerable backlog which in some regions is more dramatic than others. In particular, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's firm promise on sourcing through auction marts is not being met.

The regional discrepancies are huge. In the south-west, for example, 80 per cent. of farmers have animals that have been in the queue since the beginning of the crisis in March. That area has 26 per cent. of the total number of cattle over 30 months but has been allocated only 19 per cent. of abattoir capacity for the cull. We must adjust that balance quickly.

Similarly, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has given assurances about allocation to smaller abattoirs, some of which are on the brink of bankruptcy. From Plymouth to Cumbria, I know of abattoirs that have not been brought into the scheme despite meeting the five criteria. They are being driven out of business by the carve-up, which is sanctioned by the Ministry and the intervention board but imposed by the cartel of the Federation of Fresh Meat Wholesalers and the United Kingdom Renderers Association. That must be sorted out in the next few weeks if there is to be success by October.

We must get value for the taxpayer's money. Is it not extraordinary that the Intervention Board's original instinct, which was to ensure competitive tendering from the abattoirs competing for the business, was overruled? The excuse for not using it given by Ministers in answer to my questions was that there was an emergency.

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

Eighteen weeks on, is it still an emergency that cannot permit competitive tendering? To correct the bias of the past will require positive discrimination in the next few weeks. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said that he expects by next week to be able to sort out some of the problems. Can the Minister of Agriculture guarantee that that will happen?

The Minister of Agriculture has made clear his chosen method to assist beef producers caught in the impossible market conditions of the past 18 weeks. We accept as a good basis for further action the £29.4 million that he said will be available to farmers who have suffered from the sale of young cattle at reduced prices. In answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), he made it clear that anything that happens in the autumn in relation to store cattle will have to depend on the recovery of confidence in the market. No hon. Member who represents farming communities is convinced that there will be a recovery as fast as that. I hope that the Minister will at least accept that if matters do not improve, he will take steps to redeem that situation.

On the accelerated slaughter scheme, is there now a firm commitment to the replacement value to which the Minister of Agriculture referred? If that proves inadequate, or if the consultation that is starting only today proves that 90 per cent. is not sufficient, can we be guaranteed that at least that figure will not be reduced? If there is to be a change, the percentage should be increased. What account will be taken of the considerable costs of disruption and dislocation for closed herds that do not buy cattle in? Those are difficult matters. The figures given by the Minister are not a realistic assessment of the true cost.

Similarly, if we find that milk quotas get out of kilter, can we be guaranteed that there will be flexibility in the coming months so that that does not produce yet more burdens on a hard-pressed sector of the industry? The criteria for identifying cohorts were mentioned. Can we be sure that the draft order will not be altered in the coming weeks so that farmers can know where they stand until October?

The Minister of Agriculture has to some extent spelled out the logic of his special arrangements for suckler and closed herds, but the draft is unrealistic if it is thought that a 50 per cent. addition is sufficient to meet the needs of such herds. The draft order refers in some detail to the problem of herds that have a large number of followers, which applies especially to closed herds. Against all previous practice they are being included in herd size which dramatically distorts the figure for compensation. I hope that the Minister will reconsider that. Otherwise, as the National Farmers Union said, it will look like sharp practice that criteria different from those of any previous scheme are being used.

The right hon. Members for North Shropshire (Mr. Biffen) and for Bridgwater referred to the hoops that still must be gone through in Europe. If there are modifications to the scheme, as may well be necessary before October, will the whole scheme have to go back to the Standing Veterinary Committee? As we know, it does not approach the issues purely on scientific grounds. It is composed of representatives of the 15 member state Governments. The Prime Minister complained about the way in which it has acted in the past. If the scheme is held up or modified yet again in the autumn, there will be further delays.

On his return from the Florence summit, the Prime Minister boasted to the House that his objectives had been met and that the ban on the export of beef derivatives would go. As the right hon. Member for Bridgwater said, it has not gone. The Prime Minister also said that there would be an agreed timetable for the removal of the comprehensive, worldwide export ban on beef. He emphasised that the time scale was in the hands of the British Government. On 24 June, the Prime Minister told us that he expected that, by the end of October, the export position for British beef would be restored to that which existed before 27 March.

Last Thursday, I put questions to the Minister of Agriculture on that very point. He answered:

"The framework agreement is quite plain: it provides for a progressive lifting of the ban, in circumstances that are to be judged by the scientific and objective criteria that are spelt out. We are meeting our obligations and I expect the others to meet their obligations."—[*Official Report*, 18 July 1996; Vol. 281, c. 1291.]

Last Friday, the Prime Minister admitted to farmers in Cornwall that his timetable for lifting the export ban was "pretty speculative" and added:

"if we could meet that timetable, I would be very pleased but I think it will take longer."

Hon. Members would like to know who we should believe, and what was the purpose of the non-co-operation tactics in the forums of Europe that have left us in a worse state than when we began.

5.56 pm

Mr. Paul Marland (West Gloucestershire): I am glad that the orders for the accelerated cull have not been signed because I hope that we may find that we do not need to indulge in it. It is sensible to pause for longer reflection and consult again those involved in the trade. There is no doubt that the cull is regarded with serious trepidation by the agriculture industry. I spent some time in the cattle sheds at the royal show. Farmers were horrified that their healthy cattle were faced with the possibility of slaughter. There seems to be no scientific justification for the cull, as other hon. Members have said. More importantly, there is no guarantee that the ban on exports will be lifted because of the cull.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) about restoring confidence in British beef. I am pleased to tell the House that McDonalds told the Conservative agriculture committee that it is becoming more confident about the possibility of reinstating British beef in its restaurants. It is important to move with considerable caution in the House because the remarks that are made here have a considerable effect outside the House. I shall never forgive the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) when BSE was first debated for her incautious remarks, which had a devastating effect on the British beef industry. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) is taking a more constructive view, for which I compliment him.

We must move cautiously because of our experience of such matters. We all remember the problems of salmonella in chickens and the millions of chickens that were slaughtered to little advantage as a result of the scares and the sometimes bogus, ill-informed scientific findings that suggested that there needed to be a slaughter.

We have heard today about BSE in sheep. I have read in the newspapers that the difficulty is that Mr. Fischler's judgment is being called into question because he says that he did not mean to imply that farm sheep could get BSE. The Community is overreacting to his comments. I wonder whether by Christmas some ill-informed scientist will be saying that there is a possibility of turkeys getting BSE.

It is questionable whether the cull will be needed. I am glad that we have paused. Most importantly, we must ensure that all members of the European Community live by the same regulations. It is outrageous that BSE has been so under-reported in France and Holland. I am pleased that the French now recognise that fact. We want no more duplicity and cover-ups in Europe, planned silence by EU officials and campaigns of misinformation. One source stated:

"Officials were instructed to show a cool attitude towards BSE in Europe in case it caused an unfavourable reaction in the markets."

BSE must be tackled on a Europeanwide basis, building on scientific advice. I remind our European partners that at the end of the day, the truth always comes out. Seeking to cover up the truth in their own countries in the past have given them extremely red faces today.

6 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): The Minister said that £29 million compensation will be made available to beef producers, but I am disappointed that sum will not be topped up. Although we are debating the BSE crisis as it affects dairy and beef herds, we should concentrate our long-term efforts on making sure that the clean beef industry recovers sufficiently. If it is necessary to prop up the industry in the short term, that would be to the greater advantage of Wales and other parts of the United Kingdom. I am pleased that compensation is to be paid quickly, so that it will benefit the incomes of farmers who have suffered considerably from the effects of the crisis. I urge the right hon. and learned Gentleman not to close his mind to further assistance later this year.

Doubts have been expressed by hon. Members in all parts of the House—and I add the voice of my own party—about the need for the accelerated slaughter programme. There are concerns about the way in which the issue was handled by the Council of Ministers but now that the programme has been accepted as part of the framework, we must make sure that it runs as smoothly as possible. I welcome the increase in compensation, even though it will not represent the full replacement value for which the farming organisations have been pressing. I urge the Minister to ensure that when the measure finally comes before the House, the compensation will be not less than the sum that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has announced. I trust that he will listen carefully to the representations that the farming unions will be making for increasing the compensations upwards from 90 per cent.

I urge the Minister to reconsider consequential loss and the direct loss of income that many farmers will inevitably face. The animals caught by the ASP will often be at the top of their productive lives. Their replacements may not be as productive in their early years—the yield per cow will be down, with a consequent loss of income. I ask the Minister to consider including in the compensation programme farmers having herds in which less than 10 per cent. of animals will be affected, of which there may be a considerable number.

I am grateful to hon. Members in all parts of the House for allowing as many hon. Members as possible to contribute to the debate, to reflect points of view from all parts of the UK. The BSE crisis has had a considerable impact on farming communities in Wales. We want fair compensation, consistent with the demands on the public purse. I want compensation payments to take into account the replacement cost of the animal and the consequential loss of income to the farmer. I hope that the Minister will listen carefully to further representations between now and the time that the measure is finally approved by the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Tyler: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is clear that a large number of hon. Members still want to speak. Would it be in order to put the motion that the House do now adjourn, so that hon. Members who do not wish to adjourn may vote on it?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I do not think that would be desirable. We should hear from the Minister.

6.4 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): The accelerated slaughter programme is a matter of enormous concern, which is why we have consulted extensively with the farming industry and were pleased to have the opportunity to debate the matter today. We will give full consideration to the points made by hon. Members. The purpose of making available but not signing the orders is that we will be able to return to them after the summer recess. We will welcome over the coming weeks and months comments and responses from the industry and hon. Members on the specific details put before the House today.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will my hon. Friend have some regard for the morality of slaughtering hundreds of thousands of cattle for no good reason? I ask that against the background of the slaughter of 3.75 million head of poultry in recent years as the result of the salmonella crisis. Every day of every week, millions of fish are being cast back dead into the sea—also for no good reason.

Mrs. Browning: My colleagues and I have spent the past three weeks meeting farmers throughout the country, to listen to their concerns. In identifying which animals would form part of a cohort, we are specifically considering those that might be incubating BSE. There will be detailed discussions between vets and farmers, because the purpose of the scheme is to make sure that we identify as closely as possible animals that may be incubating BSE.

The hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) and others may find it helpful if I reiterate exactly what is meant by a cohort. We wish to identify animals that were fed at the same time as calves of animals that have been positively diagnosed as having BSE and which have been subsequently destroyed. Our intention is to identify, through records and discussions with farmers, animals that could have been part of the group that consumed infected feed.

[Mrs. Browning]

We are not in a number-crunching game but are trying to identify BSE incubation, to reduce more rapidly the number of animals that are presenting as BSE cases. The incidence of the disease is in decline. We expect just over 8,000 cases of BSE this year, without any slaughtering. We estimate the figure to be in the region of 5,000 next year and 2,800 the year after.

We must try to reassure the public here and abroad of our ability to reduce the number of BSE cases as quickly as possible, and of our determination to address BSE—which has admittedly been on a huge scale in this country compared with others.

We have heard some helpful speeches tonight by hon. Members who have taken a close interest in the subject. We are sensitive to the fact that, for many farmers, the destruction of animals is an emotional thing. It is not only about finance and compensation. There is a lot of emotion attached to it. Often, a herd represents many years of hard work. For that reason, we are not seeking to muscle through a policy without taking into account the views of the industry and the House.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister has made it clear that, in announcing the levels of compensation today, we seek not only to give what we believe to be a fair level of compensation, bearing in mind that we do so on behalf of the taxpayer, but to take into account the disruption that will be caused especially on farms which have a larger number of affected animals than others. That has been made clear in the representations that have been made to us.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) mentioned specifically the numbers—

Mr. Beith *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 22, Noes 188.

Division No. 212] **[6.10 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Beith, A J
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Chidgey, David
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Rendel, David
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and Ms Liz Lynne.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, John
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John D *(Strangf'd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John

Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Richard Ottaway and Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after one and half hours after the motion was made, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put, pursuant to Order [19 July].

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Appropriation Act 1996

Armed Forces Act 1996

Trusts of Land and Appointment of Trustees Act 1996

Damages Act 1996

Asylum and Immigration Act 1996

Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Act 1996

Social Security (Overpayments) Act 1996

Housing Act 1996

Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996

Statutory Instruments (Production and Sale) Act 1996

Broadcasting Act 1996

Education Act 1996

School Inspections Act 1996

Deer (Scotland) Act 1996

Allied Irish Banks Act 1996

City of Westminster Act 1996

Code of Conduct

6.24 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move,

That this House approves the Third Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, House of Commons Paper No. 604, and in particular—

(a) approves the Code of Conduct prepared pursuant to the Resolution of the House of 19th July 1995,

(b) approves the Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct of Members, the modifications to the rules of the House contained therein, and the guidelines to the application of the Resolution of the House of 6th November 1995 (Conduct of Members) contained in paragraph 58 of the Guide, and

(c) authorises the Committee on Standards and Privileges to make such minor amendments to the Guide to the Rules as appear to it to be justified by experience or necessarily reflect decisions of the House; and to report such amended versions of the Guide to the House.

The House will recall that on 19 July 1995, almost exactly a year ago, the House resolved that a code of conduct should be drawn up and placed before it for approval. The report that is the subject of this debate, containing such a code and accompanying guidance, is the product of six months' very considerable work on the part of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, which I chair.

I want to pay tribute, with more than usual formality, to all the members of the Committee for the spirit in which they have approached that task. There were of course differences in the Committee, but all were resolved by discussion so that we achieved a consensus and produced a unanimous report for the House. Indeed, there was no vote of any kind at any stage in the whole of those six months in relation to the production of the code. I am prone to refer to the fact that I had a Quaker education, and I take some satisfaction from the fact that the Committee proceeded on what the Society of Friends would call a "feeling of the meeting basis", and that we managed to achieve those agreements.

I want to express, I am sure on behalf of the whole Committee, our collective gratitude, and I hope also that of the House, to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Sir Gordon Downey, for the contribution that he made to our deliberations, with much wise advice.

I do not propose to speak at great length. The Committee's views are contained in the text of the report and the associated documents, and I want to ensure that there is plenty of time for Members who wish to contribute to do so. I shall also probably be less generous than I sometimes am in giving way to interventions, because it would not be wise for me to attempt further textual interpretation on the hoof although, if I can be helpful to the House later in the debate, I shall be glad to do so.

The first part of our report contains a code setting out general principles to guide hon. Members on the standards of conduct that the House and the public have a right to expect of all Members. In the second part, we seek to set out a guide to the rules on registration and declaration of Members' interests, to the rule banning paid advocacy and to the complaints procedure.

In preparing the guide, we reviewed the current rules relating to the registration and declaration of interests, and we recommend certain changes, which I shall briefly

[Mr. Tony Newton]

summarise, but I should make it clear that very few of the changes are substantial. Our main concern was to achieve greater clarity and consistency in the way in which the rules are applied, taking account of the changes agreed by the House last year.

First, on registration, we recommend that the period within which a Member returned at a by-election should complete a registration form and submit it to the Commissioner should be extended to three months. That simply makes the position of Members returned at general elections and those returned at by-elections the same. At present, there is a difference.

Secondly, any Member who has a registrable interest that has not yet been registered should be required to abstain from any parliamentary action, except voting, to which the registration would be relevant, until notification of the interest has been given to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. Members are of course already required to register a new interest within a month of acquiring it.

I hope that the following recommendation, like the rest, will be considered a commonsense recommendation. We recommend that accommodation provided by a local authority at no cost or at a subsidised cost to a Member solely for the purpose of holding constituency surgeries—not subsidised office accommodation, but accommodation solely for the purpose of holding constituency surgeries—should be exempt from registration.

The guide also updates and amends the guidance on the interpretation of the rules on registration and declaration, most of which have been in existence for some years. Those additions and modifications include confirmation of the long-standing practice that a Member need not register attendance at a conference or a site visit in the United Kingdom where the organiser meets reasonable travel and accommodation costs only. There is also an updated list of categories of overseas visits that are exempt from registration, including those that are financed from UK public funds.

Section 2 of the guide provides additional advice on the rules on declaration. For example, advice is given on the occasions—such as business questions, the report suggests—when Members should consider declaring a relevant interest even though there is no formal requirement to do so. We also recommend that the rule that requires notice to be given on the Order Paper of any relevant pecuniary interest when tabling any written notice should also apply to notifications given to the Speaker's Office in respect of daily Adjournment debates and requests to present a Standing Order No. 20 application to the House.

We have given particular attention to framing workable guidelines for the application of what is now called the "advocacy rule", passed by the House in its resolutions of last November. Our recommendations closely reflect the observations of our predecessor, the Select Committee on Standards in Public Life, in its second report, which the House debated last November, as well as our own detailed consideration of the application of the rule on advocacy to the proceedings of the House.

Our full proposals on the application of the advocacy rule are contained in section 3 of the guide. Paragraph 58 sets out the guidelines on the application of the advocacy rule as it applies, on the one hand, to initiating a parliamentary proceeding and, on the other, to participation in debate. The paragraph also gives examples of what is meant by initiation or participation in that context.

Paragraph 62 sets out certain parameters to the operation of the rule, which allow appropriate latitude to, for example, hon. Members who are successful in the ballot for private Members' Bills and receive assistance from outside bodies, and hon. Members who have visited a United Kingdom dependency at the expense of the Government of the territory.

Paragraph 63 gives illustrative examples of how the guidelines might operate in the case of a Member who is a company director or a paid adviser to an organisation, or who may be caught by the advocacy rule in some other way.

Finally—this is important as it would be a rash member of the Committee who said that he or she was convinced that we had every point of detail right—the motion before the House would authorise the Committee on Standards and Privileges to make minor amendments to the guide on the basis of experience.

I have said on several occasions that the resolutions agreed by the House last year constituted the most substantial strengthening of the rules of the House for a very long time. Today's resolution, while in one sense less significant as it does not in itself introduce further major change, is none the less important, both in consolidating those earlier changes and in translating them into the practical working guidance that can give them best effect. I commend it to the House.

6.34 pm

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): I am delighted to have a chance to speak in this debate, and to be a member of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges. When my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), who is the Liberal Democrat Chief Whip, asked me to serve on the Committee, I did not realise how much time it would take, but it has been time well spent, and the code of conduct is proof of that. Tributes are not often paid across the Floor of the House as the Chamber's layout makes a confrontational style of politics more manageable, but I appreciated how the Committee Chairman, the Lord President, managed our deliberations. It is remarkable that we never divided on the issues that we covered.

I shall restrict my remarks to three issues: sponsorship, visits and outside employment. Sponsorship is covered in paragraphs 21 to 23 on pages 16 and 17 of the code. Having re-read those paragraphs several times in the past few days, and following reports that started in last Sunday's *The Observer*, I suspect that there may be a loophole in paragraph 22, to which the Committee may have to return. The issues raised by *The Observer* relate mainly to Ministers, for whom there is a separate code of conduct that is supposed to be tougher than that for other hon. Members.

The exposure in Sunday's *The Observer* illustrates a failing of the current system. If one believes the report, hon. and particularly right hon. Members have appeared at dinners to be lobbied by business men and women, in return for large sums of money, laundered as tax-deductible "entertainment" expenses in company

accounts, but which quickly end up in Conservative central office funds. According to the reports, the Premier club is hiring out the Prime Minister at up to £100,000 per person to have dinners with business men and women bidding for some of the most lucrative privatisation deals that the Government have on offer. If the reports are to be believed, the chairman of the Premier club, Mr. John Beckwith, is not just bidding to take over Ministry of Defence homes that are to be sold off but, according to *The Guardian* today, wants to—

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Although we have the privilege of saying what we believe to be right in this Chamber, if someone who has been referred to has specifically denied the report in *The Guardian* on the radio today, it would be courteous to people outside the House if the accusation were not read into the record.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I am sure that the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) will have noted the point that has been made.

Mr. Jones: I am sure that Mr. Beckwith denies those reports and I hope that they are not true, but they show that the position must be dealt with and clarified. If people who take part in Premier club dinners are bidding for privatisation schemes, and the Cabinet decide who will be the successful bidders, there is a conflict of interests. That is exactly what the Nolan committee was set up to stamp out, what the public find distasteful, and the kind of practice that brings the House into disrepute. I hope that there is no truth in it.

I prefer the rightful indignation that the eminent journalist, Tom Brown, expressed in yesterday's *Daily Record*, where he said:

"Any businessman who forks out £100,000 for the dubious privilege of having dinner with John Major should be a candidate for instant dismissal by his shareholders."

Two months ago, in response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the Prime Minister said that he had devolved responsibility for party fund raising more than three years ago to avoid possible conflicts of interest. If one believes any of the newspaper reports, that does not seem to be the truth. Clearly, the Prime Minister did not mean to mislead the House. Why, then, did he say those words to my right hon. Friend? If we are to rebuild the House's reputation, such activity must cease and all Members of Parliament must stick to a code that is fair and is seen to be fair and above board.

Overseas visits are covered in paragraphs 27 and 28 on page 18. There is a clear difference between visits undertaken on behalf of Her Majesty's Government, which are part of our duties as Members of Parliament, and trips such as the "jolly" to Malta recently reported in *The Independent on Sunday*. Select Committee visits play an important part in informing hon. Members on issues on which they must report to Parliament. Foreign affairs and defence are two vital subjects on which hon. Members must be properly briefed. Britain's overseas aid programme supports many countries throughout the world, so the House has a duty to ensure that the receiving nations spend the money prudently. That is why the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and other publicly funded organisations occasionally send delegations. Britain is also responsible, through the European Union, for helping emerging democracies.

Last January, I was one of six parliamentary observers at the elections to the new Palestinian council. It was certainly no "jolly". Apart from the blizzard in Jerusalem, the town of Nablus to which I was deployed was dry—no alcohol—and had only one hotel. The hotel was full and I found myself sharing a room with a communist parliamentarian from Portugal named Reuben. I hasten to add that we had separate beds. On polling day, observers were up at 5 am and on duty until the following morning. It really was no "jolly".

Such visits are an important part of our job and, as such, the Committee rightly decided that they should be exempt from registration and the advocacy rule. Although right hon. and hon. Members may still accept visits paid for by companies or foreign Governments, they must register each visit and may not initiate any parliamentary action relevant to that company or country.

Another important exception to the advocacy rule involves visits to United Kingdom dependencies, such as Gibraltar. On page 30, paragraph 62(7), the code states that

"visits to a UK dependency at the expense of the Government of that territory must be registered and declared",

but that

"such visits shall not be taken into account when applying the advocacy rule".

The third area that I shall mention briefly is paid outside employment. I cannot understand how hon. Members find the time to do justice to a job outside Parliament—perhaps my constituents in Cheltenham are more demanding than most. At the end of the week, I find that I have little or no time to spend with my family, let alone to do another job. The work of Members of Parliament is becoming more full time and the hours that we spend working for our constituents and for our country should reflect that fact. Although it is not stated in the code of conduct, I believe that our duties here should constitute our main income. I do not seek to ban outside interests altogether, as I believe that they help us to keep in contact with the real world beyond Westminster.

I hope that no hon. Member will seek to exploit loopholes in the new code of conduct. If hon. Members find what they consider to be loopholes—and there may be some—they should contact the Commissioner or a member of the Committee, and the Committee will deliberate on the matter. I hope that the code of conduct will go some way to restoring public faith in the House and in the people whom the public choose to send here.

6.40 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): The speech by the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) is unlikely to have that effect. That kind of speech may go down well at the Liberal Democrat party conference, but it is not appreciated in the House. If hon. Members choose to repeat allegations from a newspaper article, they have an obligation to listen to what is said by the principals involved. The person involved in that case made his views clear on the radio at lunchtime today. The hon. Gentleman could have checked the allegations by making a simple telephone call. As he obviously spent much time preparing extensive notes for his speech, I suspect that he could have uncovered Mr. Beckwith's response.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): What did he say?

Mr. Bottomley: I do not intend to repeat what was said on the radio. I simply put on record the fact that someone who prepares his notes as extensively as the hon. Gentleman did, should take into account what is said outside this place.

I shall make three non-partisan points—although one might be considered, wrongly, to be partisan. The first concerns overseas visits by Members of Parliament. It is sad that a growing number of Members of Parliament do not know much about the world beyond the United Kingdom. I am glad that few hon. Members have experienced war—which is one reason why previous generations travelled. However, few hon. Members have experience of other Commonwealth countries, which can add to the quality of debate.

It is important that people travel whenever possible, and I do not think that we should rely simply on the opportunities provided by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and political observer trips. Perhaps this is not the right time to suggest it, but I believe that Members of Parliament should have the opportunity to travel almost where they want and when they want, perhaps every few years. It is important to know what the world is like: one can then interpret what is broadcast in the media and what appears in the newspapers according to one's personal experience.

I have had a number of overseas trips during my 21 years in Parliament. Some were balanced: I visited Israel and the west bank with the Conservative Friends of Israel, and I later travelled to Lebanon and the west bank with the Palestine Liberation Organisation. That experience proved immensely important and useful when considering middle east issues.

I also visited El Salvador three times. I first travelled to that country with the parliamentary human rights group, which was funded by charities, in an attempt to delay the assassination of an archbishop. On my second visit, I represented the British Council of Churches at the archbishop's funeral mass. On the third occasion, I attended the free and fair elections that aimed to prevent assassinations of archbishops and many others. That trip was paid for by the Salvador Government, who wished to have credible observers in attendance.

I have no hesitation in declaring those trips and their sources of finance. I do not want Members of Parliament to be discouraged from taking trips because an entry in the Register of Members' Interests is interpreted as a bad thing. I urge hon. Members to apply the local newspaper test. They should ask themselves, "Am I doing something that I would mind being reported in my local newspaper?" If they would not mind, they should tell the local newspaper; and, if they would mind, they should either tell the local newspaper, or not do it. People expect a culture of openness.

The rules and the changes they embody take us backwards in one sense—I do not wish this point to be considered party political. The trade unions and other socialist societies set up the Labour party honourably. In the past, Labour Members were encouraged to state that they were sponsored by trade unions under the Hastings agreement.

As I understand it, that meant that up to 80 per cent. of candidates' election expenses could be met by a trade union. I am not saying that all trade unions sponsored candidates to that extent, but I think that I am correct in saying that that meant potentially £5,000 in funding at a general election and £16,000 at a by-election, as we have lifted the spending limits for by-elections.

Under the present regulations, a Member of Parliament in those circumstances would declare that he or she was sponsored above 25 per cent. for election expenses. There is a great deal of difference between saying that one is sponsored above 25 per cent.—which is what the rule requires—and declaring funding of £5,000 or of up to 80 per cent., which is what the Hastings agreement allows.

At election time, there are only two legal entities: the candidate and the candidate's appointed agent. Any money that is spent during the election campaign is spent on behalf of the candidate, and authorised by his or her agent. I do not believe that we have solved the problem by proposing that money should go to the constituency Labour party, as though it were independent of the candidate. Candidates will still benefit from that funding in what I call "cash for votes". I believe that we should try, in a non-partisan way, to be open about the real situation. I do not argue that it should be illegal, but openness is important.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I wish to clarify one point. The Hastings agreement, which the hon. Gentleman described accurately, has been terminated by the Labour party, so there is no such thing as a sponsored Member of Parliament. The rules laid down by the Committee about contributions to election funds or annual contributions to constituency parties are the same for all hon. Members.

Mr. Bottomley: I am not trying to argue against the Labour party or against contributions to constituency political associations or parties—I hope that I have made that plain. However, openness is the key.

Money that is given to meet expenses at election time or on an annual basis can only advantage the candidate. Conservative associations and Liberal Democrat and Labour constituency parties do not exist as legal entities at election time—there are candidates and their agents, and that is it. I hope that the situation will be clarified further in time. I shall happily engage in discussions with people in an attempt to achieve that.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: If that is the case, am I correct in suspecting that the hon. Gentleman is in favour of Lord Nolan's examining the question of political funding? He refers to funding local Conservative associations and Labour and Liberal Democrat constituency parties, and to money being donated at a local level. Therefore, is he in favour of the inquiry for which many hon. Members have been pressing?

Mr. Bottomley: I am not in favour of referring that matter to Nolan. This is not the time for me to provide a series of answers, but I believe that the current rules lead to greater obscurity, and are based on a legal fiction.

Finally, I refer to category 5, dealing with gifts, benefits and hospitality. Due partly to my peculiar position, my entry in the Register of Members' Interests refers to the fact that I am the recipient of a fair amount of corporate,

sporting and cultural hospitality, both in my own right and through my wife. I am grateful for that. However, it is difficult to know how seriously one should treat the detail in the category.

For example, I was invited to a party at an English Heritage property in my constituency which a newspaper report suggested cost significantly more than £215 per person. I do not want to have to ask my hosts—private or corporate, who may have some link with my position as a Member of Parliament—how much my presence has cost them, and then decide whether I should declare it. In time, perhaps we shall learn whether the category is achieving the desired result and whether there are many complications of the kind that I have illustrated.

6.48 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I welcome the publication of the code of conduct and guide to the rules, which will help hon. Members, but I want to refer to the application of the advocacy rule, because its implementation is already leading to consequences that I cannot imagine the Committee can have fully intended. May I give two or three instances of what I mean?

The other day, I heard from a Labour Member who came to the House relatively late in life that he was caught by the advocacy rule, because he is the recipient of a pension that he receives as a result of a lifelong career in the mining industry. As a result of that pension, which is properly declared, he is apparently precluded from initiating actions. He receives a continuing benefit as a result of his employment in that industry. That is my reading of the matter.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: May I point out that anyone who receives a pension from previous employment does not receive money in his or her capacity as a Member, and that therefore no restrictions would apply?

Mr. Waller: As I understand it, that Labour Member nevertheless receives a benefit that is related to an industry.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: No.

Mr. Waller: If I am wrong, that Labour Member has clearly been misled, because he felt precluded from initiating actions. In a forum in the House, he drew attention to that point, but if he was wrong and has been misled, I am delighted to hear it.

May I give one or two other examples? Two or three years ago, I was invited by the Kashmir committee of Copenhagen in Denmark to speak at a one-day conference, which I did at some inconvenience. It meant flying out early in the morning. I saw little of Copenhagen. What I saw was from the taxi that took me from the airport to the conference centre, and from the one that took me on the return journey.

On my return, I properly declared the visit, and it appeared in the Register of Members' Interests as a one-off "benefit", but, as I understand it, as a result of the proposal that is to be implemented with the introduction of the 1997 Register, if I were to make such a visit in future, I would be prevented from initiating any action connected with Kashmir for one year.

That seems wrong, bearing it in mind that many of my constituents are Kashmiris and that they expect me to represent their interests, among those of my other constituents, in the House. I hope that the Committee will consider that concern, because it would be regrettable if Members were prevented from taking part in such visits for that reason.

Mr. Newton: May I establish one point, because it would make a difference, and I would be hesitant to make snap judgments anyway? Did my hon. Friend say that his visit was funded by an organisation in Denmark that was interested in Kashmir, by a Government—I am not quite sure whether one can talk about the Kashmir Government—or by what might be described as a non-governmental organisation? If the latter is true, I suggest that he considers paragraph (e) on page 32, where his reservations might be put to rest.

Mr. Waller: On this occasion, I am not sure, to be honest, where the money originated. It certainly came from the Kashmir committee in Denmark, but that committee would, I imagine, to some extent have been funded by the Government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, so there is a certain grey area here. Hon. Members may feel inhibited in accepting an invitation to go on such a visit.

More generally, Members may be invited to visit a country in which they have had a long interest. Today, I participated in a radio programme with another Labour Member, who for more than a decade has been a member of an all-party group connected with a particular country. He was invited by the Government of that country to visit it. He probably knows more about that country than almost any other hon. Member. As a result of the implementation of these rules, if he were to accept such visits in future, he would be prevented from speaking about that country for a year.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): It seems not only that what my hon. Friend is saying is important, but that it would give the House an opportunity to say that, where the code is invoked, it is possible for the House in a particular debate to waive that restriction in the circumstances. I wonder whether that is the intention of the code.

Mr. Waller: The code seems to be clear and unequivocal. It is important that we should have transparency. Members who speak in the House should understand that everyone appreciates where they come from, and that they may have interests that have to be declared, but to prevent Members from speaking because they sought to improve the extent of their knowledge by accepting an invitation to visit a country seems to be going too far.

In general terms, the public would like full-time Members—we often hear that—but at the same time they want Members to know something of what goes on outside the House, and to have experience and an understanding of other countries. We must find a happy medium between those two principles. I wonder whether the advocacy rule in its present form goes too far, and whether it includes too many visits or benefits. When I

[Mr. Waller]

say "benefits", I use the term in the way in which it is expressed in the document. Many would not necessarily regard them as benefits.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I help the hon. Gentleman? He should try to draw a distinction between speaking in the House and initiating proceedings. In this whole area, that distinction is clearly drawn. If he reads the report in that sense, he will find that he has far more liberty on these issues than he thinks he has. I reassure him, because there is strong support for his case, and we believe that the report's recommendations meet all his concerns.

Mr. Waller: I fully appreciate that it is possible for a Member to speak in the House, provided that he or she has not initiated the debate or motion, or tabled a question. There is still a considerable inhibition. It should be unnecessary to prevent me from initiating a debate for a year after I have visited a country and found out a lot about it, provided that I have put it on the record and everyone knows about it. We have gone a little over the boundary that was necessary to ensure that there was full transparency. I just hope that the Committee keeps the matter under review.

6.58 pm

Sir David Mitchell (North-West Hampshire): I declare an interest, having served on the Committee.

I should like to join others in paying tribute to the Chairman of the Committee, the Leader of the House. He has had a pell-mell round of meetings, coming from one and going to another. He has always seemed to be on top of the agenda, and has had an extraordinary ability to carry the whole Committee with him with a bluff common sense. In that, he has been fully supported—I pay tribute to this—by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), the shadow Leader of the House. It was an unusual Committee in many ways—very much the House at its best. It was non-partisan, and was seeking to safeguard the respect of the House outside this place.

The Committee has fully and fairly discharged the responsibilities under its remit, but I have one reservation. It concerns not so much the Committee's work, as its remit in relation to the resolutions of the House banning advocacy. In future years, the House may look back and feel that it has lost something.

I have never been a paid consultant to any industry or organisation outside the House, but the consultant to a trade union or trading association performs three clear roles. He holds a watching brief for that industry, advising it if anything is about to be raised in the House that would affect it—such as regulations, EC regulations or commercial interests that might damage it. Secondly, the consultant familiarises himself with the working of the industry so that, if there is a problem, he thoroughly understands it. Thirdly, he raises in the House matters that would affect that industry.

Hon. Members would, in effect, be paid overtime for in-depth study and knowledge about a particular industry. The House passed the resolution banning advocacy last November, and I fear that to some extent we may have thrown out the baby with the bathwater. Fewer hon. Members will undertake the extra work to gain the in-depth knowledge of an industry, whether as a trade union representative or as the representative of a trade association.

Although I fully support the Committee's work in interpreting the will of the House, and I believe that we should have transparency, maximum disclosure, maximum openness and full and open declaration, I also believe that, in the long term, the House will regret that it has banned advocacy and, with it, lost the greater, in-depth knowledge that would have been brought to bear in our debates.

7.1 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I start by joining those hon. Members who have complimented the Leader of the House on the way in which he chaired the Committee. Our meetings over the past few months have been purposeful. They may have been slow on occasions, but that was often because of the detailed work we were carrying out in order to try to ensure that the guidelines we produced were as consistent and comprehensive as possible.

The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) said that he was surprised by the number and length of our meetings. Had he served on the previous Committee, he might have been relieved that our meetings were not more numerous, or on a daily basis. He might also have been relieved that the Committee is not, as far as we know, sitting in the parliamentary recess.

Much work has been done in the Committee. I asked my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who has taken a keen interest in the subject, whether he was going to speak. He said that he was not, as he thought that the report represented "good, hard, nitty gritty work by the Committee". I report that to members of the Committee as a compliment to all involved. It certainly felt like good, hard work, and I think that it has been productive.

The objectives we set ourselves were, first, to establish a code of conduct to lay down principles by which the actions of Members of Parliament could be judged in future. Secondly, we tried to write guidelines that would help in the detailed practical application of that code of conduct, so that, if hon. Members were in any doubt about what they would or would not be able to do following a visit, or if they had a particular interest, there would be advance guidance, and they would know exactly where they stood. The third—extremely important—objective that we have tried to stress is that all Members of the House have an obligation to take it upon themselves to ensure that they do not act in a way that would breach the letter or the spirit of the rules we have laid down.

I hope that what we have established is clear enough. I also hope that all hon. Members will read the code of conduct and the guidance notes. One thing that all members of the Committee have learned over the past few months is that many of us have forgotten some of the rules that existed, such as those relating to Members' interests. Many colleagues may not have read all the rules that existed, or understood the implications.

A couple of Conservative Members have taken issue both with the remit of the Committee and with how far it has gone. At this stage, I simply remind hon. Members why we got into the situation in the first place. It was

owing to the actions of a couple of hon. Members in the case that has become known as "cash for questions". That led the Prime Minister to establish the Nolan Committee.

It was the Nolan committee's report that led to resolutions in, and decisions by, the House designed to change the rules on registration and advocacy, and to ensure that whatever we did involved as much transparency as possible, in order to start to restore public confidence in Members of Parliament, because that confidence had been so badly affected by the "cash for questions" case. Public opinion demanded that the House set its affairs in order. The public's opinion of Members of Parliament is often jaundiced because of past incidents.

I hope that the code of conduct and the guidelines that we have established will work and will be practical—I think and hope they will be. I do not preclude the need for revisiting some of the issues, as other aspects may arise from time to time. The Committee may have to see how the code works, and try to ensure that the guidelines are as precise as they should be.

It is interesting that, when the code of conduct was published last week, there was little press or public interest in it. That might have been because there were no spin doctors explaining to the press exactly what had happened—the press seem to have to be spoon-fed on all occasions. It might also have been because no member of the Committee leaked the document, which may be unusual these days.

The inquiries that I have received about the code of conduct have been strange. People have sometimes asked whether Members of Parliament had any rules before—I think that Members of Parliament have sometimes had the same thought. Of course there have been rules, and of course the majority of Members of Parliament have been acting and operating in a perfectly honourable manner, but because of what had happened in the past, it was important that we consolidated the resolutions of the House, brought them together in one document, laid out the code of conduct and issued as many guidelines as possible to ensure that the rules were clear and there were no escape clauses.

The hon. Member for Cheltenham mentioned the recent publicity surrounding the Premier club, where contributions are made to the Conservative party in exchange for meetings with the Prime Minister. I referred to the need to have statements on that subject when I spoke in this morning's Adjournment debate.

The hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) tried to say that, because John Beckwith had spoken about his lack of interest in social security offices on the "World at One" programme—although I think that he confirmed his interest in Ministry of Defence properties—it was not an issue.

The issue is not simply whether one business man has found ways of contacting the Prime Minister and has an interest in certain sales that are currently pending.

Bigger issues of principle are involved, which is why I believe that the issue of political party funding should have been referred to the Nolan committee when we first suggested it some time ago. Today is not the day to go into all those details, although I think that we will have to return to the issues on another occasion, and that we should have had the inquiry before, and not after, the next general election.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On this, the last day before the summer recess, the accusations that have been made against the office of the Prime Minister are the most serious that we have heard since the most recent Liberal Government, when there were suggestions that Lloyd George was selling honours for cash. The suggestion now is that the Prime Minister is using and prostituting his office for his party's financial gain. There can hardly be a more serious charge than that.

I am sure that, when inquiries are made, we will find that that is not the case, and that the Prime Minister has not prostituted his high office for his financial gain. However, is it not a matter about which we need an inquiry urgently?

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend is right to say that we need an inquiry urgently. We need an inquiry into the entire range of party funding. The Premier club, however, raises questions that go outside the scope of this debate, such as whether it should be a matter for tax officials and for company auditors if companies are offsetting the costs of the dinners and their club membership against their tax liability. That is not the main thrust of this debate. Had the entire issue been referred to the Nolan committee earlier, however, we might have avoided the need to raise such questions, because such practices would have diminished.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Would it not be a little more sensible for the hon. Lady to find out a little more about this matter before commenting on it? I would not criticise for a moment the lavish dinners that the Labour party has held to raise funds and its profile, and to improve its contacts with the City and its donations from industry. All those activities are entirely legitimate, and I do not for one minute impugn anyone's integrity for doing or accepting such things. I ask only for a similarly charitable attitude from her towards the other side the House.

Mrs. Taylor: I suggest only that all parties should be completely open about the scale and sources of domestic donations and of those from abroad. We have always found it very difficult to achieve any agreement with the other side of the House on that point, which is why, as I said, the matter should have been referred to Lord Nolan some time ago.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I find it quite remarkable that Conservative Members resist the proposition of an inquiry into political funding—because it will happen under a Labour Government. So why not accept the proposition? Let us get on with it. Why be seen to be dragged and protesting, when the inevitable outcome is that such a debate will take place?

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend is quite right, and not for the first time. It is only a matter of timing. Lord Nolan is, indeed, due to examine the whole issue. The problem is that he will not examine it until after the next general election. I think that the electorate have a right to know about party funding before any general election.

The hon. Members for Eltham and for Keighley (Mr. Waller) expressed some concern about hon. Members being able to undertake foreign visits for fact-finding purposes. We should make it clear that there are no restrictions at all on what hon. Members can do.

[Mrs. Taylor]

Restrictions apply only if an hon. Member has had a visit paid for. The restriction is simply that, for a period, the hon. Member should not initiate any action that would bring benefit to the sponsor of that visit. I think that that is a very minimalist approach. The approach is not over-burdensome, and it will not inhibit genuine fact-finding missions, which are frequently necessary.

The hon. Member for Keighley made a couple of points, during which I felt it right to interrupt him. I am grateful to him, as I am to the Leader of the House, for giving way. The hon. Member made two points—one of which was of concern to him, and another which was of concern to a colleague—that show that not all hon. Members fully understand all the implications of the current rules or of the new rules.

An hon. Member who receives a pension or undertakes employment that is totally unrelated to their membership of the House is not restricted in his or her activities. An hon. Member who goes abroad at the request of someone abroad who pays for that visit is prohibited not from speaking in the House but from initiating any action for a certain period.

The hon. Member for Keighley said that, on one visit, he was not sure where the money had originated. I must say that the onus is on each hon. Member to be sure who has paid for a visit that he undertakes, and that it is somewhat foolish to undertake visits on any other basis.

The hon. Member for Eltham talked about sporting activities. He also cited an English Heritage party in his constituency. All hon. Members, as constituency Members of Parliament, are entitled to normal hospitality in our own constituencies. Clearly, however, there are problems with sporting occasions, and with estimating their value. On this matter—as indeed on every other matter—we now have the Parliamentary Commissioner, who can give advice to hon. Members. In the first instance, it is to him that all hon. Members should go if we are seeking advice on that basis.

The hon. Member for North–West Hampshire (Sir D. Mitchell), who served on the Committee, disagreed with its starting point. He wishes that we could turn the clock back, and that we had never passed the resolutions of last November. I think that we had no alternative but to tighten up our rules. We were right to do so, not only because of the problems that had arisen but because the lack of public confidence in the House.

I do not think that this code of conduct and the guidelines that we have laid provide the answer for everything, but they will start the process of giving clearer guidance to hon. Members about how they can and cannot act. The public expect no less, and I hope that this will be a useful starting point.

7.17 pm

Mr. Newton: With no discourtesy intended towards the House, I do not think that I need to sum up at length. I regret that material was introduced into the debate which is not very relevant to it, and that it has been used to recycle allegations that—as we now know—have been denied by one of those named. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister commented on the material at Prime Minister's Question Time on 23 July.

However, given the fact that what was said was said, I must say that the suggestion that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is—I think that I remember the phrase used by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn)—"prostituting his office" is an absurd allegation to be made under the privilege of the House, and that it is bordering on the disgraceful.

In quieter terms, I shall deal with the debate in general. I very much agree with what the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) has said on every subject other than the one that I have just mentioned. I am grateful to her and to other hon. Members for their kind words about my chairmanship. I reciprocate those words, and endorse the compliment paid by my hon. Friend the Member for North–West Hampshire (Sir D. Mitchell) to the hon. Member for Dewsbury on the part that she played in our deliberations.

I agreed with the comments by the hon. Member for Dewsbury on what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller). I think that, if he examines paragraphs 63(d) and 63(e) of the report—to one of which I have already referred—he will find that we have dealt with the anxieties that he expressed, which are the anxieties that were expressed last November. I think that we have dealt with those anxieties successfully in this code, and that he will find that his mind can be put at ease.

Equally, I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham that, unless I am misremembering the 25 per cent. rule, which he regards as somehow a slip backwards, it is basically exactly the same rule as already exists. There has been no change in that respect, but there has been a change in the nature of the on-going relationships of the Labour party under what was known as the Hastings agreement. Clearly, that is a matter for the Labour party, not for me.

Our approach has indeed been consensual, because I also agree with the hon. Member for Dewsbury that my hon. Friend the Member for North–West Hampshire, and, to some extent, my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley—had he been here, the same could be said of my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Sir R. Sims)—expressed reservations about what the House did last year. However, the job of the Committee that I now chair has been to give practical guidance on interpreting and implementing decisions.

I think that the House should now—

Mr. Flynn *rose—*

Mr. Newton: No, I shall not give way.

I hope that the whole House will acknowledge the need for us to examine the rules and consider the Committee's work, and agree that we must collectively try to make the rules work to the benefit of the reputation of this place, about which we all care a great deal.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House approves the Third Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, House of Commons Paper No. 604, and in particular—

(a) approves the Code of Conduct prepared pursuant to the Resolution of the House of 19th July 1995,

(b) approves the Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct of Members, the modifications to the rules of the House contained therein, and the guidelines to the application of the Resolution of the House of 6th November 1995 (Conduct of Members) contained in paragraph 58 of the Guide, and

(c) authorises the Committee on Standards and Privileges to make such minor amendments to the Guide to the Rules as appear to it to be justified by experience or necessarily reflect decisions of the House; and to report such amended versions of the Guide to the House.

Central Railway Order

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I must advise the House that Madam Speaker has placed a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches in this debate.

7.20 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I beg to move,

That this House, pursuant to section 9(4) of the Transport and Works Act 1992, approves the following proposals, contained in an application for an Order submitted under section 6 of that Act by Central Railway plc on 20th May 1996 and entitled The Central Railway Order, for the construction and operation of a railway between Leicester and the Channel Tunnel via Rugby on a dismantled railway alignment to link with the existing Chiltern line through Buckinghamshire to near Olympia in London, from where a new railway would be constructed in a tunnel under the Thames to Streatham, where it would run beside the existing Brighton line to south of Coulsdon, then under the North Downs close to the M23 and then beside the existing railway to Tonbridge, Ashford and Folkestone; and for the construction and use of freight terminal sites at the M1/M6 junction and next to the M25 and M40 in Buckinghamshire.

As this is the first time that the procedure under section 9 of the Transport and Works Act 1992—or TWA for short—has been used, I should perhaps explain briefly some of the background to and purpose of this debate.

The TWA has replaced private Bills as the means by which new railways, tramways and certain other works projects are authorised. It gives Parliament a continuing and important role in relation to schemes of national significance by requiring Parliament to consider and vote on the principle of such schemes.

The purpose of this debate is to enable the House to decide whether the Central Railway application should go forward for more detailed consideration at a public inquiry and, possibly, to the eventual making of the order authorising its implementation.

The motion before the House seeks approval of the proposals. I should perhaps explain why the motion is one to approve the project. I considered whether it should be a "take note" motion which could be amended by hon. Members who wished either to amend or oppose it. I concluded that it is only by proposing a motion to approve the project that a conclusive outcome could be assured at the end of a single debate.

If the House rejects the motion, the scheme is effectively dead as the order could not be made. If the House passes the resolution, the project will be considered in another place. Only if the application is approved in both Houses can it proceed to more detailed examination at a public inquiry.

The House will wish to bear it in mind that Parliament's endorsement of the principle of the project would be bound to carry weight with the inquiry inspector in making a recommendation.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): My intervention will be brief as I realise that it is a short debate. Is not it clear—if not, will my hon. Friend the Minister make it clear—that we cannot adopt the desirable aspects of the project, which include freight coming off the roads and on to rail, which is something that we all want, while at the same time rejecting the awful aspects:

[Mr. Harry Greenway]

that it would damage wildlife in my constituency and send heavy trains within inches of people's homes, which is intolerable? Is it possible to take partial decisions?

Mr. Watts: I think that my hon. Friend will find that I deal with that matter a little later in my speech.

As I was saying, endorsement of the principle by the House would weigh with the inquiry inspector and, indeed, might weigh with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in deciding whether to make the order. It would not necessarily mean that the order would be made. The Secretary of State could still decide, having taken into account the inspector's report, that the application should be turned down. This is no different from the Secretary of State's statutory position under general planning and highways legislation.

I turn now to the specific application before us. Central Railway's objective is to establish an independent railway connecting the midlands, London and the channel tunnel. The proposed alignment is described broadly in the motion. The railway would use standard track gauge but, unlike existing railways in this country, would have greater clearances to enable lorries and double stack containers to be transported.

The main service to be offered would be frequent shuttle trains carrying lorry trailers between freight terminals located near motorway junctions. Central Railway says that the project has been planned to maximise the use of former or existing railway lines. Where new track is necessary, it would be mostly adjoining existing lines.

The draft order contains powers for Central Railway to build and operate the railway and terminals, to acquire land compulsorily, to create new accesses to motorways and other roads, and temporarily or permanently to stop up or divert streets and footpaths. A number of provisions seek to disapply parts of public general legislation, including the regulatory regime for licensing and track access in the Railways Act 1993. Central Railway has also applied for planning permission to be deemed to be granted for the construction and use of the works specified in the draft order.

The works would involve, typically, the laying of railway lines with associated signalling and overhead electrification equipment, and civil engineering such as earthworks, tunnels and bridges. Because of the larger train gauge, the track would need to be lowered, or existing bridges raised, to enable the freight trains to operate. Freight terminals would be constructed near Rugby and at New Denham in Buckinghamshire, and a maintenance facility would be provided at Lutterworth.

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): Is not it the case that the plan involves the construction of some 24 km of tunnels, some of which would be wider than any tunnels now in use?

Mr. Watts: The proposal certainly involves some extensive tunnelling, but, again, I shall come to that point a little later in my speech.

The application also contains proposals for new passenger stations at Lutterworth, Rugby, Woodford Halse, Brackley, West Wycombe and White City. Central Railway estimates that about £3 billion will be required to finance the project.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): Does the Minister accept that for a fraction of the £3 billion that he cited we could upgrade the existing west coast main line to the necessary standard and probably move freight from road to rail, something for which we perceive there to be a demand? Would not that perhaps be a better way forward?

Mr. Watts: The two issues are fundamentally different. I have not seen estimates for upgrading the freight capacity of the west coast main line which would come anywhere near £3 billion. Essentially, however, it is for the private sector promoters to decide whether it is worth their while to promote such a project and to raise the finance. Of course, this is an entirely privately funded proposal, whereas the hon. Gentleman is possibly thinking of some public sector money for upgrading the west coast main line.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Has there been any consultation between the developers and any local authorities along the route?

Mr. Watts: Applicants under the TWA are advised to consult local authorities and others affected by any proposals. The company claims that it has consulted extensively.

If parliamentary resolutions approving the project are passed, the company would seek to raise additional equity funding to finance the inquiry and statutory blight compensation. Central Railway estimates that the project would capture and retain 25 per cent. of the UK-continental market for lorries and containers, which is about 15 per cent. of total UK-continental freight tonnage, within four years of opening.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid–Kent): I am sure that we would all be interested in a list of the companies that are providing the money to keep Central Railway afloat. I am sure that my hon. Friend will have such a list; it is just that I have not seen it.

Mr. Watts: I am sorry to disappoint my hon. Friend. I do not have such a list. Frankly, I do not think that it is relevant to the consideration by the House of the principle.

Sir David Mitchell (North–West Hampshire): As we are dealing with a new procedure, at what stage will there be an examination of the financial viability of the process?

Mr. Watts: That would be appropriate at a public inquiry were both Houses of Parliament to allow the scheme to proceed to that point. It would be unreasonable for us to expect the company to have raised the full project financing at this stage in the development of the project.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): If the financing of the project is crucial to its viability—as to whether it would lead to extended planning blight—does my hon. Friend have any idea whether his Department could undertake a feasibility study into whether the total cost of the project would be £3 billion or £6 billion, as has been suggested elsewhere?

Mr. Watts: It is not for my Department to second-guess the promoters of the project. On the matter of blight to which my hon. Friend referred, the company has assured us that it has the means to meet any statutory blight obligations that it might incur.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): The hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) has just referred to the crucial issue that concerns many of our constituents. Why should they suffer years of blight on the property they have worked hard to buy and on which they may still owe a considerable amount of mortgage repayment? Why should they suffer an on-going unawareness of what will finally happen? That is the crux of the issue that unites hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Watts: As I said, the company has given us assurances that it can meet any statutory blight obligations that it incurs. If we were to find that it was unable to meet such obligations, we would determine against the application.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I had not intended to speak, but I am becoming increasingly bemused. Has my hon. Friend met the promoters? Is he totally satisfied that they really are people of substance and that they can carry out the project? If he is not, why are we wasting our time?

Mr. Watts: At this stage of the application, it is not for me or my Department to determine whether the company would be able to raise £3 billion. That is a matter for the company. Our legitimate interest is in whether the company could meet blight obligations. That is obviously a concern to every constituency Member affected by the project. As I have said, the company has given us undertakings that it can meet any such obligations. If we were to find that it was unable to do so, we would refuse the application.

Ms Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that Ove Arup commented:

"They have clearly not demonstrated that they have adequate funds available to meet their obligations for compensation for blight and to fund the public inquiry".

The House should be aware of that.

Mr. Watts: I am aware of that opinion, which is taken from a report that was prepared in support of some of the objectors to the project. However, until it could be shown that the company's undertakings cannot be honoured, we would be wrong to make a judgment on that.

As to the funding of the public inquiry, as I said in my opening remarks, the company intends to raise the additional funding required to take the project to a public inquiry in the light of a decision made in the House.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): I have already inquired in a letter whether the company could pay compensation for blight if the House approved the order tonight. My understanding is that there is no such guarantee. However, is there not something fundamentally wrong with the 1992 Act if a company without evidence of financial viability plus the lack of coherent planning policy can create such mayhem without first producing a planned proposal? Frankly, if it happens again, the Act must be changed.

Mr. Watts: There may well be lessons to learn from this case as to the way in which such matters are dealt with, but as this is the first time that the powers have been used, it would be premature—certainly in tonight's debate—to conclude that the procedure is flawed. However, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it may be appropriate for us to examine the procedures in the light of experience of this case.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): The old system required the Government to be neutral if they were in support of a proposal. They state in their paper of 19 July:

"The Government is not however persuaded that the proposals have such substantial merit as to enable it to commend the application to Parliament. It has therefore decided that its stance on the scheme should be neutral."

Can I take it that under the new procedure, being neutral basically means being unconvinced and probably being against?

Mr. Watts: No. Being neutral means what it says. We have adopted a neutral stance at all times in our dealings with the company. However, there is a question as to what might have shifted the Government from being neutral to supporting or opposing the project. For the Government to support such a scheme, they would need to be persuaded that the merits of the proposal were so overwhelming as to justify unequivocal support. I did not reach that conclusion. That is why the position of the Government tonight is still one of neutrality—of neutral neutrality.

Central Railway estimates that the project would capture and retain 25 per cent. of the United Kingdom and continental market within four years of opening. By 2010, the midlands terminal would be catering for 16 million tonnes of freight and the New Denham terminal for 10 million tonnes. The average number of freight trains required to deal with that volume would be 98 per day.

Central Railway is seeking to keep compulsory land acquisition to a minimum, but recognises that realignments of existing tracks will be required at some locations. It believes that most work could be carried out within normal maintenance schedules, but some may involve temporary closures with replacement bus services. It says that no significant interference with services will be required during the upgrading of the Chiltern line but that the company will liaise with Railtrack and London Underground to co-ordinate the construction programme so that disruption occurs during periods of minimal railway operation.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): As my hon. Friend has referred to the fact that Central Railway proposes to adapt the existing Chiltern line, what assessment has the Department of Transport made of the likely impact of the scheme on the commuter services that my constituents use every day?

Mr. Watts: If the House and another place were to allow the scheme to proceed to public inquiry, and if such an inquiry recommended that it should be permitted to go ahead, in deciding whether to make such an order, I would have it in mind that I have powers to vary the order and

[Mr. Watts]

I would be prepared to do so in so far as I deem it necessary to protect existing passenger railway services. An assessment has not yet been undertaken because we are at too early a stage in the consideration of the application.

The company says that it would seek to keep disruption to a minimum by ensuring that works were carried out during periods of minimum rail operation—commonly on Sundays or late evenings. After construction, the company claims that no existing services would be affected by the operation of the new railway. In very broad terms, that is the applicant's case.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): Those are extraordinary claims. Although my hon. Friend's position is neutral, I am encouraged by the fact that I have never before heard such a barrage of real questions on such an issue. I am encouraged by the mood of the House.

Mr. Watts: I have tried to set out in fairly neutral terms the case that the company has presented.

I turn to the Government's view. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Perhaps the House will find it helpful if I explain how we arrived at this position of neutrality. The Government are anxious that the decline in rail's share of the freight market is checked and reversed. We believe that the key to that lies in giving the private sector the right opportunities and incentives. That is why five of British Rail's six rail freight companies have already been privatised and the sixth is on the market. The Railways Act 1993 created new opportunities—which have already been exploited—for entirely new own-account rail freight operations to be established. We continue to make available substantial support to rail freight through freight facilities and track access grants.

Sir Keith Speed (Ashford): The rail companies that have been privatised, indeed all rail freight, and many other organisations are backers of the piggyback consortium, which presents a totally viable solution. It would cost £100 million, mean no new railways at all and operate a freight service from Glasgow to Folkestone. What is the Government's view on assisting that in the next two years?

Mr. Watts: I am not going to give any commitments on assistance, but I agree with my hon. Friend that the piggyback idea is most interesting and has considerable potential. I hope later in the summer to see a demonstration of a prototype piggyback vehicle.

The Government also want to bring private finance into the provision of transport infrastructure. The channel tunnel rail link is the outstanding example of private finance helping to provide an entirely new railway line. Central Railway's proposals would go further in so far as they would be 100 per cent. privately financed. So, from two points of view—freight on rail and private finance—the Government's objectives could be assisted by Central Railway's plans. It is for those reasons that, although we have urged the promoters to consult widely and take account of consultees' views, we have not discouraged them from working up their proposals.

The question for the House tonight is whether Central Railway's specific proposals have sufficient merit to be worthy of the House's endorsement in principle. That must involve consideration not only of whether the project fits the broad thrust of transport policy, but whether the particular proposals are acceptable in principle, having regard to such matters as environmental impacts and effects on existing passenger services during construction and in operation.

Under the TWA procedure, there is a six-week objection period. The Department received almost 14,000 representations dated on or before the deadline of 1 July. Roughly 98 per cent. of respondents registered objections to the project. The Department has analysed some 6,600 objections, and found that more than 90 per cent. of objectors raised concerns about local environmental impacts of the project during construction and/or in operation, 60 per cent. object to the perceived adverse impacts on rail passenger services and road traffic, and 40 per cent. think that the principle of the project is flawed.

Blight is naturally a concern. All major new developments are likely to have adverse local effects. The House may wish to take a broader view: does the project offer sufficiently strong regional or national benefits to outweigh any local disbenefits? The House may wish to give due weight to the views of the planning authorities and the national environmental agencies, which are able to make an objective and strategic assessment of the project. Only two authorities—Surrey county council and Reigate and Banstead borough council—have expressed support for the project in principle, and even they expressed concerns about the adequacy of the information supplied by Central Railway. While supporting the principle of moving freight by rail, 37 local authorities said no to the project and expressed serious concerns about alignment, locations of the terminals, adequacy of the environmental statement, impacts on existing railway services, and, around the freight terminals in particular, road traffic.

All the environmental organisations that have responded are also either opposed to the scheme or have expressed specific concerns. Bodies such as English Nature, the National Trust, the Environment Agency, the wildlife trusts, the Council for the Protection of Rural England—with the exception of two of its branches—and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds have been critical of the adequacy of the environmental statement. The National Trust, for example, has commented that the statement does not refer specifically to its land, even though the Central Railway's proposal bisects the trust's Sandhills estate near Bletchingley in Surrey.

The Government want more freight to be carried by rail and more transport infrastructure provided by private finance. However, we cannot—indeed we should not—ignore the number and weight of representations that we have received against this project. Many of them were from persons who and organisations that support the policy of moving more freight by rail. It would be wrong to consider the principle of such a scheme without regard to its effect on the ground. Nevertheless, if we had thought that the arguments for the specific proposals outweighed the force of the objections, we might have been prepared to recommend that the House approved them. But we are not so persuaded. We are therefore making no recommendation in respect of this application and leave the decision to the good judgment of the House.

7.46 pm

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): I shall be brief because I know that many hon. Members want to express their constituents' concerns.

The Central Railway scheme will demolish many homes and properties and cause grave disturbance and blight to many more. Thousands of ordinary households will suffer in one way or another whether the scheme is built or not. The question is whether the benefits of such a proposal can possibly outweigh its manifest disadvantages. The answer is, as I shall argue, a resounding no, which is why the order deserves to be roundly defeated and why I give notice of my intention to call a Division at the conclusion of the debate.

In the Streatham Vale area of my constituency, the building of a two-track railway would mean the loss of homes, gardens and retail premises. The proposed running of unusually heavy complete lorry trailers and double-stacked containers would cause unacceptable noise and vibration. Above all, the planned construction of the six-mile tunnel under London from Streatham Vale opens up the prospect of a protracted nightmare of noise, lorry movements, dust and pollution for local residents.

Two years ago, a Department of the Environment advice note called for the diversion of channel tunnel-related rail freight around, and not through, London. For several years, the London Channel Tunnel Group—a consortium of London boroughs of all political persuasions—has advocated the upgrading of rail routes around London from Redhill to Reading for use by such freight. A Department of Transport study has acknowledged the technical feasibility of that so-called North Downs line.

Mr. Rowe: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, this very week, British Rail set aside £500 million to take account of the fact that it has grossly overestimated the amount of freight passing through the channel tunnel? Does not that show that speculation about how much freight capacity is needed is still at a very rudimentary stage?

Mr. Hill: I entirely agree. The fact is that the tunnel under London is not just environmentally unacceptable: it is unnecessary.

It goes without saying that no one in this Chamber or in the country challenges the principle of the need to transfer more freight from road to rail, but there are other more immediate, more practicable and more viable means of achieving that objective.

Next month, the first wagons operated by the public-private consortium, the piggyback consortium, will begin running between Glasgow and London on the west coast main line. It is one of several projects designed to carry lorry semi-trailers piggyback fashion on rail wagons. Unlike the Central Railway scheme, the loading of semi-trailers can be carried out at railheads nationwide; Central Railway is proposing just two terminals. Unlike in the Central Railway scheme, semi-trailers can be carried throughout the continental rail network; Central Railway's lorries would have to be offloaded at Calais. Unlike Central Railway, which proposes an entirely new line, carrying semi-trailers by rail requires relatively minor upgrading of lines and bridges, at relatively modest cost.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): In south Yorkshire, far from Leicester, London or the Chilterns, there is great concern about the line. A private sector initiative in Doncaster is building an important freight hub that will move a lot of south Yorkshire's heavy engineering goods off the roads on to rail, swinging around London into Europe. Is my hon. Friend therefore aware that Central Railway's proposal, if it goes ahead, would seriously damage the financial viability of that project? The message from south Yorkshire is that the Government, far from being neutral, should vote against the proposal.

Mr. Hill: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He makes the general point that the project would put a question mark over a range of enormously valuable and immediately achievable schemes. That is a powerful reason for opposing the scheme.

The cost of the piggyback consortium project would be about £100 million, compared with Central Railway's £3 billion—if we believe Central Railway's figures, which few experts do. London and Continental Railways, which is to build the channel tunnel rail link, has analysed the scheme and concluded that it will cost £6 billion—twice Central Railway's estimate. Ove Arup, which has some reputation as a transport and engineering consultancy, claims that the total costs will be 90 per cent. more than Central Railway estimates. Another group of transport consultants, MDS Transmodal, has calculated that Central Railway has overestimated the likely revenues by as much as three times and will never be able to recover the questionable £3 billion, let alone twice that sum.

The business case for Central Railway simply does not stand up to scrutiny. After all, it is a company with net assets of little more than £100,000. At the end of last year, its managing director wrote in the company report:

"Obviously, the company cannot guarantee that money will be available from investors to build the railway".

That, to say the least, was something of an understatement. The proclaimed jobs and the proclaimed equipment purchases are mere fantasies—they will never materialise.

This evening, the House is being invited to approve a public inquiry into the scheme. Such an inquiry would add two or three more years to the blight that would affect thousands of householders along the route until the scheme inevitably folds. We cannot fairly inflict that on our constituents. This is the wrong scheme at the wrong time from the wrong company. It is up to the House to take the responsibility for this matter and to consign Central Railway's scheme to the scrapyard of history.

7.53 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): As has already been said, the issue of whether to proceed with this scheme with the endorsement of the House is one of principle. It is thus inescapable that, by the end of the debate, the House must take a view on whether the scheme is financially viable. The House would have no justification for sending the scheme on to a public inquiry unless it was reasonably satisfied that it was financially viable.

The difficulty that we face—it is entirely of Central Railway's own making—is that the company has given the House a paucity of information about the scheme's

[Sir John Stanley]

financial viability. I tried to obtain from the chairman of the company a copy of the prospectus that it issued in 1995 when it made its last funding issue. The reply that I received was highly instructive. The chairman said:

"I do not wish to be remotely difficult, but we do not, as a company policy, distribute the prospectus on a general basis as the offer to which it refers has been closed for some considerable time."

That is an extraordinary response to a Member of Parliament with a direct constituency interest in a project for which a company is seeking approval. Luckily, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave me a copy from his filing cabinet, for which I was grateful.

The prospectus is the crucial document when it comes to financial viability. It is the only one that gives us some information about what the company's expectations are in terms of revenue, cash flow, operating costs and assumptions about the transfer of freight from road to rail. It is bizarre that the House should be holding this debate without the prospectus being available in the Vote Office. No doubt there is a copy somewhere in the Library—it always manages to get hold of every single piece of paper.

Significantly, however, when the documents for this debate were deposited by the company in the Library of the House on 20 May, the huge bundle of documents—I have taken some pains to comb through them—did not include either a prospectus or any information of consequence about the financial viability of the scheme.

As for the company's attitude, it has placed a most interesting document in the Vote Office, telling Members of this House:

"So far as the company is aware, private sector developments have never been required to prove financial viability, and objections on that score are misconceived and should be disregarded."

Is it satisfactory that a public company seeking the approval of this House should thus dismiss objections on the grounds of financial viability as apparently irrelevant?

Only two of the documents placed in the Library bear on the financial viability of the scheme. One of them is headed "Cost Estimate". It might be thought that this would be a bulky document since it concerns a £3 billion project. I have brought it with me into the Chamber; I am not exactly groaning under its weight. It consists of a single sheet of A4 paper, containing on one side 17 lines of cost headings. That is all the costing information that has been placed before the House.

The cost estimate in itself is subject to great doubt. It is believed to be an underestimate, possibly by 100 per cent. The real cost probably amounts to £6 billion.

The second document placed in the Library is headed "Funding Statement". It too consists of one side of one sheet of A4. I want to quote just one sentence from it, as it is the only sentence that the company has placed before the House concerning the scheme's supposed financial viability. The sentence reads:

"The directors of Central Railway believe that the projected nominal internal rate of return for this project is sufficient to allow the project to be funded in the market through the development and construction phases and into the operational phase."

That is the one and only indication of the financial viability in the documents placed in the Library.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North–East): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir John Stanley: No. If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I am conscious that many hon. Members want to speak and I shall be as brief as I can.

That is the one sentence the House has been provided with as a basis on which to proceed on an assumption of financial viability—a belief of the directors, expressed in one sentence and wholly unquantified. It is significant that hon. Members are being treated with infinitely less candour on the issue of financial viability than was the case just 15 months ago, when the company made its last application for funds in an equity issue.

When the prospectus was issued, in addition to getting the company's view about whether the project would be financially viable, those who got hold of the prospectus were at least told of the financial risks. In this case, the House has not been told anything of the financial risks.

I shall quote one of the 15 risks detailed in the earlier prospectus.

"The company may fail to raise equity or debt on the terms proposed in the Base Case, or at all."

It is clearly stated that the company may not be able to raise the money at all. Why has that key financial information not been placed with all the other risks in the process? Why has that not been placed before this House or in the Library? Why was it not put in the Vote Office?

It is not acceptable for hon. Members to be asked to approve this project on the basis of totally inadequate financial information. On the basis of what we have been shown, this project is, frankly, a total financial speculation. I do not have any difficulty with those who wish to engage in speculation—there may be some who speculate on the national lottery, the horses, the football pools or certain stocks and shares. It is one thing to have a speculation where only those who are making the speculation stand to lose, but in this project the losers would not be those who may choose to speculate in the shares of Central Railway, as they could limit their risk and speculate only to the extent that they were willing to lose the money that they advanced in buying equity; the real losers would be the people who were dragged into the project on the back of the speculation. People all the way from Rugby, through the midlands and around the home counties to west and south London, Surrey, Kent and on to the channel tunnel would lose—tens of thousands of people would be blighted. If this House gives the project assent, they will be blighted for years to come and their environment will be damaged.

I do not believe that there is any conceivable basis on which we can reasonably and responsibly approve a scheme when the uncertainty about its financial viability is almost total, and the only real certainty is the devastating environmental damage it would do the length and breadth of the scheme.

8.4 pm

Ms Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): It might help the House to know the views of the Labour Front Bench at this point in the debate, and I shall try to put them briefly as I know that many hon. Members wish to speak.

We are, like many hon. Members, strongly committed to the aim of getting more freight on to rail. We made this clear in our policy document "Consensus for Change" which was published recently, and I set out in more detail how we would set about achieving this in a speech to the rail freight conference on 5 June. I therefore approach this project with sympathy, but I am afraid my conclusion is that the proposal is unrealistic, is not economically viable, will not come to fruition and is causing blight and upset for no good purpose.

I spoke briefly on the telephone today to Andrew Gritten, the chair of Central Railway. He asked me to speak to Central Railway's financial adviser, John Cramer. He told me that he used to work for Goldman Sachs, and also used to be Minister for Transport in Illinois. He argued that to create a successful freight railway, one needs very large volumes, low costs and high frequencies. He believes that to achieve that, the freight railway needs control over its own infrastructure and to have dedicated facilities. He pleaded with me to allow the application to pass today so that it could go to the next stage for full consideration. I said to him—and I say to the House—that I am well aware that investment in new infrastructure causes blight and that that is sometimes necessary in the public interest to carry through major new infrastructure projects. But in this case, it seems clear to me that the whole project is unrealistic and not properly considered. It would therefore be wrong for the House to allow the problem of blight to continue.

Let me cite a few examples of the unrealistic nature of the proposal. It is a 180-mile line, 57 miles of which are to be reinstated on an old route. Near Rugby, incidentally, the old route goes through a new housing estate. It will then move on to an upgraded Chiltern line. The plan involves the compulsory purchase of 41 miles of the Chiltern line. But Railtrack says that it will not hand over ownership, and I understand that Central Railway has not made any approach—at least until May—to propose buying the lines.

In addition, Central Railway has said in its brief to hon. Members this week that work to upgrade the Chiltern line would not involve any widening or extra tracks. But today I was told that it would involve extra track. Yesterday, Adrian Shooter of the Chiltern line said that it would not be possible to integrate the proposed number of Central Railway trains with existing passenger services. He says that Central Railway has consistently refused to tell him how many trains it will run. He learnt only yesterday that it would be five to six per hour. It seems clear to me that not enough work has been done and not enough detail has been settled and the proposal to incorporate the Chiltern line means that it is not a dedicated freight railway, as is claimed.

On top of this, the proposed gauge—which is very high because the lorries are intended to roll on to the trains—will not be able to continue beyond Calais, because the gauge is smaller on the continent. That makes it a defective scheme in my view. But there is no provision for a terminal in France. Central Railway says that the project will cost £2 billion to £3 billion—as we have heard—but Ove Arup says it could be twice as much.

My hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) referred to MDS Transmodal—a shipping and freight consultancy keen to get more freight on to rail. That company says that Central Railway has underestimated the cost of locomotives. The type of wagons that are budgeted are not safety approved for the tunnel, and are unlikely to be in the future. In addition, estimates of revenue are unrealistic.

I could go on, and give more examples of this unrealistic nature of the project but I do not want to take up the time of the House. The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) referred to the fact that those who are keen to see more freight on rail want attention to be drawn to the alternative plans—costing only £100 million—that would enable the west coast main line greatly to increase its freight capacity and remove the same traffic from the road as would the Central Railway plan. This scheme could be completed in two years. Central Railways' plan would take four years after the public inquiry had been completed and the funding found—if it could ever be found.

In contrasting these schemes, I would like to say in passing that this is an example of the deeply unsatisfactory rail system that the Government's privatisation has given us. [HON. MEMBERS: "She's spoilt it."] It does not spoil anything—it is true and the Secretary of State should listen. The privatised railway is so fragmented that there is no strategic centre to the system that is capable of judging which freight scheme best serves the public interest and ensures that that is carried through. I set out in a recent speech to the Adam Smith Institute—Conservative Members may wish to note that—how Labour will ensure that such a strategic centre is established. It is a failure of the privatised network that we are having this mess today when a cheaper and better scheme is available, and the Government are not getting behind the scheme that would best serve the public interest.

My conclusion is that the most persuasive case for passing the application tonight is that it needs much more development and that its passage would allow detailed consideration to take place. However, as the Minister said, if the House passed the proposal, it would be like a recommendation to the planning inquiry from the House. No responsible Member could possibly recommend it and no responsible Government could be neutral about such an unsatisfactory scheme. The proposal is before the House and that requires us to take a view. The project is well intentioned but unrealistic. It would be wrong for the House to allow large numbers of people along the route to continue to suffer blight. I advise that we should vote to refuse the application.

8.9 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I do not always agree with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short), but I am in substantial agreement with her comments on the great central line. Certain of her other comments passed me by but the first section of her speech was admirable. I especially liked her reference to Rugby and its housing estate. What she said about Rugby could be echoed for every constituency on the line.

This is the first time that the Transport and Works Act has been used since it was enacted in 1992. The subject for that unique occasion is the application by Central Railway plc to restore a major section of the old great central line. I suspect that the way in which the Act operates will lead the House to amend it in the fullness of time but that is not a matter for tonight.

It is intended that the reopened line will cater principally for freight and carry the lorry trailer and the tractor unit on flat-bed rail trucks. The House will

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appreciate that the carrying of the tractor unit in addition to the load is not an efficient way to transport freight. The line has been disused for some 30 years. In some parts, it has been become a nature reserve and a public amenity. In others, factories and housing estates have been built over its site. Were the reopening to go forward, enormous environmental damage would occur.

Many houses have been built and bought in the knowledge that a disused railway line is close by and while Central Railway claims that it has a property protection scheme, it admits that it has no money to acquire properties or to meet any statutory blight notices. That was the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) in his powerful speech. Many hundreds, if not thousands, of homes and businesses face a future that at best might be described as uncertain.

It is significant that the development is opposed by groups ranging from statutory bodies such as county, district and parish councils to the National Farmers Union and various wildlife trusts. All come together in opposition to this proposal. One of the reasons for the breadth of opposition is the existence of a viable alternative. That point was made by the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill), by my hon. Friend the Minister during his strong speech and by the hon. Member for Ladywood.

The alternative is the piggyback consortium, which involves lorry semi-trailers being carried piggyback on rail wagons on the existing west coast main line. I have correspondence from the consortium dated 8 July that confirms that the first wagons will be launched in the United Kingdom next month, when a revenue service between London and Glasgow using low-height trailers will commence. The consortium is working with Railtrack to upgrade existing lines from Glasgow to the channel tunnel to enable standard 4 m high lorry semi-trailers to be carried.

It is estimated that the infrastructure work may take two years and cost about £100 million. That is not an insignificant sum but it pales into insignificance when compared with the costs quoted by Central Railway, which optimistically says that the cost will be about £3 billion. As the hon. Member for Eastleigh [HON. MEMBERS: "Streatham."] I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. As he said, consultants Ove Arup have issued a report that puts the cost substantially higher than that currently quoted by Central Railway.

Central Railway has not developed an environmentally sensitive scheme. Its environmental statement does not identify significant effects or specify plans to mitigate the undoubted noise and nuisance. Substantial doubts exist that adequate landscaping, noise abatement and habitat protection have, or can be, provided.

This is one of those rare occasions in the life of the House when there is general agreement between the three major parties. It is significant that the Labour and Liberal parties have come out strongly in opposition to the development. My hon. Friend the Minister said that the Government are, and must be, strictly impartial because of their quasi-judicial role. However, Back Benchers do not have to be impartial. One has only to look around the Chamber to see the growing opposition to this crack-brained scheme and the number of Conservative Members who will oppose it in the Lobby tonight. There is no substantial demand for the reopening of the great central railway line outside the financial interests of the sponsors.

Freight can be taken off the roads and the environment can be protected by using the existing west coast main line and the piggyback consortium. It is worth recording that, unlike the Central Railway, the piggyback consortium is supported by local authorities, Eurotunnel, the Freight Transport Association, the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, P and O Ferrymasters, PowerGen Property, Rail Freight Distribution, Railtrack and SNCF. Many other major companies are associated with the consortium but a full roll-call would take up too much of the House's time.

I urge the House to reject the application because it is as unnecessary as it is unwanted. It is disruptive, damaging and will cause enormous worry and distress to substantial numbers of the people who we are elected to defend. I intend to divide the House and urge all right hon. and hon. Members to vote no tonight.

8.18 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): It is rare that we have a free vote on an issue of national importance. Even if it is at the 11th hour of our last day, it is gratifying that so many hon. Members are present and clearly intent on voting. I shall be brief because I know that many hon. Members want to speak so I will not rehearse the well-established Liberal Democrat transport policies. I assume that hon. Members can take them as read, whether they agree with them or not. I shall concentrate on Central Railway.

Over the past few weeks, many hon. Members will have been lobbied by the company, which emphasised that Central Railway's private initiative and financial commitment would be at risk if Parliament does not allow the scheme to progress to the next stage. Although my party welcomes private and public sector financing partnerships in our transport infrastructure, provided that it accords with transport strategy, it is odd that Central Railway should appeal to our good nature. The risks are well known. The Transport and Works Act 1992 makes clear the requirements that promoters must meet if they are to take a project forward. Organisations that subscribe to market forces should be happy to allow that procedure, and not complain if the result does not go their way.

The report by Ove Arup, consulting engineers of international reputation and integrity, was independent and not in support of any particular group. The whole point of engineering consultants is that they offer professional and independent views, of which we should take serious note.

The project documentation has been well described. I invite hon. Members to compare that documentation, or the lack of it, with the amount of information that was presented to the House when it reviewed the progress of the channel tunnel rail link and the amount of work that went into establishing the viability of that scheme.

I want to address the three key issues of the scheme's impact on the environment, its impact on the democratic process and its synergy with the national transport strategy. We are all in favour of switching as much freight as possible from road to rail, and my party has set a target

of 10 per cent. over a reasonable period. However, that objective is not itself an argument for building a 208 km railway, particularly when the existing rail network is capacity-hungry for freight. We are aware of the damage and uproar caused by recent new motorway construction. Hon. Members will recall the incidents at Twyford Down when the M3 was completed—I live in that constituency, so I remember them well. Railway construction is no less environmentally damaging and is arguably more so. The gradients that must be achieved for a railway are less than for a motorway, so require deeper cuttings and higher embankments—not to mention the 24 km super-diameter tunnelling that will be required. One returns to the argument that we already have an existing rail network crying out for investment.

The Minister said that 14,000 letters of objection have been received, and 50,000 people have signed a petition against the project. The reason for that controversy is that planning officers and locally elected councillors have been shut out of the process and starved of information. It is well established that Central Railway has continually sought to limit information by seeking waivers against the requirements of the 1992 Act, which has undermined the democratic checks and balances that are well established in local and county councils.

If the House approved the order and outline planning permission were subsequently granted, the public inquiry would be concerned not with whether the project should proceed but with when, how and where. The House would remove at one stroke the basis of local democracy, the planning process and local accountability. Local plans painstakingly developed over decades by district councils to serve their communities would be thrown aside. Dozens of communities would be shattered by blight for many years. The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) pointed out that housing estates would be cut through, parks destroyed, industrial estates torn down and immense traffic problems created as side roads were used for access.

Of course there is an urgent need to attract freight from the roads to rail. There has been an appalling decline in rail freight volume in recent years, and the state of the west coast main line is a classic example of lack of investment and poor maintenance leading to extensive speed restrictions and disrupted timetables. Nevertheless, the west coast main line is the most extensive and complex link in the national network. It is the major artery connecting the heart of the west midlands and our manufacturing base with the rest of Europe. The proposals of the piggyback consortium show how quickly an essential freight service could be provided. It would use the channel tunnel and connect directly with the continental rail network, without any necessity for a change of gauge or Central Railway's super-gauge, which cannot connect with the mainland European network.

For a fraction of the cost of the Central Railway scheme, the west coast main line can and must be upgraded as an essential part of our national rail strategy. That can be achieved with minimal disruption, to meet the demand for rail freight that can be created if Railtrack is required by the rail regulator to provide cheap, efficient and attractive rail access to freight operators.

It would be wrong for Parliament to act as a planning supremo in granting or making way for an order that would overturn local plans, ignore the needs and wishes of local communities, and circumvent local democracy. It would be wrong to grant or assist an order to permit a massive construction that would cause untold environmental damage and make Twyford Down look like a side road closure order. It would be wrong to grant an order for a hugely expensive and disruptive scheme while the west coast main line remains neglected, underfunded and underused. Parliament should direct its energies at forcing rapid improvement to our existing rail network as its highest priority. I hope that the House will join me in voting against the order.

8.27 pm

Sir Keith Speed (Ashford): I will not reiterate the comments by hon. Members in all parts of the House because time is short. I quarrel slightly with my hon. Friend the Minister when he says that consultation has taken place with many local authorities. I am informed by Kent county council and Ashford borough council that consultation consisted of encounters with two or three people who were unwilling or unable to answer any questions of consequence. Fortunately, we have good officers in both authorities and they were able to interpret the little information that was provided and the scheme's likely effect on their communities—which would be extremely bad.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) and I have lived for eight years under the blight of the channel tunnel rail link. First there were four routes, then two and then two other routes. That created enormous misery for people who had invested their life savings in houses but who had to move because of their work or for financial reasons, having been caught in negative equity. They were confronted by an apparently implacable bureaucracy. The Central Railway scheme has already produced several months of blight. The blight did not start on 20 May, when the order was first laid. It has long been evident in my constituency and, I suspect, in many others. I hope that the House will sound a resounding death knell tonight on this ill-considered project, so that blight will be truly and properly ended.

My hon. Friend the Minister read out a statement from the Central Railway consortium that by and large there would be little disruption to existing services. That is nonsense. It is nonsense for the Chiltern line. My hon. Friend has not mentioned, but I am going to, the international station at Ashford. I had the great honour of inaugurating that new service on 8 January this year. Ashford is a pretty narrow gap. We have the main lines from Maidstone and the main lines from Tonbridge. We have lines going off to Canterbury, Folkestone and Hastings and in addition we shall have the new channel tunnel rail link going through Ashford.

If the Central Railway line project goes through, it will be much bigger than the others. No one has yet mentioned the vertical deviation of plus or minus 10 m. Central Railway is so precise that we are talking about 33 ft up or down. How can one interpret things like that on a map, for heaven's sake?

The international station at Ashford, which has been open for only two months, will be largely demolished and, we hope, rebuilt—we do not know how—to enable the line to go through. The station already has 7,000 people a week going through it and is fast expanding. It is doing a good job not only for Ashford but for a swathe of counties and constituencies from Essex to Bristol. It will

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be completely disrupted. No wonder that the channel tunnel rail link people, Eurostar and all the rest feel that the Central Railway line will be the death knell for any stations on the Eurostar route outside London.

I have said enough to show that, even in my part of the world, there are problems. There will be six lines going down from Ashford to Folkestone. The project will involve the demolition of a mediaeval church and a village school. I agree that if the line is built it will cost £6 billion-plus, not £3 billion, but let us also consider the cost to local authorities. If there is a series of local planning inquiries, officers of district councils, parish councils, borough councils and county councils will have to do a great deal of work to make sense of the nonsensical maps with which they are working so far. Time for officers is money. Why should the taxpayer, either local or national, pay a penny more for this ill-gotten scheme? It must be killed and killed now.

8.31 pm

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North–West): I speak on behalf of many concerned constituents, to inform the House that Croydon says no to Central Railway. The people of Croydon say no to the scheme, for environmental, social and economic reasons, not least in terms of jobs. It has been estimated that in Croydon there would be a direct loss of 62 residential properties, many in Croydon, North-West. There would also be a direct loss of 40 commercial premises, which currently support about 580 jobs. There would be loss of access to premises, which support a further 200 jobs. There would also be significant effects on the environment and ecology of the area, including the felling of up to 500 mature trees. There would be other impacts on nature and the ecology.

Many people are worried about the loss of garden space. I understand that. More than 600 residential properties in Croydon would lose garden space. For about 110 properties, the loss would be so significant that the garden space left would be below council standards—a minimum of 8 m in length for a back garden. There would be increases in noise levels.

I have received more letters—well over 150—on this matter than on any single issue since I became a Member of Parliament.

Mr. Tim Smith: I have had a thousand.

Mr. Wicks: The party of inflation will speak for itself later. I have received more than 150 letters—not petitions or postcards, but handwritten letters from concerned groups. I pay tribute to the community groups in my borough and elsewhere, which have led the fight against the scheme. I pay tribute in particular to Vera Hunter and Charmienne Bold—two of our key local activists.

One pensioner from Norbury who wrote to me said in her letter that her husband had recently had a stroke and was now wheelchair-bound. She said that he did not need the added stress of their house being blighted by Central Railway. Another pensioner couple in Norbury said that they had spent all their savings on a house to make it comfortable for their old age, and they now feared that it would be uninhabitable, because of pollution.

Another constituent from Norbury said:

"If Central Railway have their way it will be sheer hell. There will be more filth and many other disadvantages."

Another constituent from Thornton Heath said:

"The noise coming from these trains . . . would be unbearable."

Another talked about her garden and said, perfectly reasonably, that her 81-year-old mother

"should be able to tend the whole garden she has lived with for over 50 years without any interference."

Another constituent from Croydon said:

"I bought my house 2 years ago and have spent thousands of pounds renovating it to make it comfortable and also to increase its value. I have no intention of being driven out by the greed of a few people in high places."

I could quote from many other letters, but both Opposition and Conservative Members wish to speak.

Central Railway should receive a gold medal in any Olympics for arrogance, and at least a silver medal for insensitivity. Despite inadequate funding and the fact that it is a toytown, tinpot company, it has sought the time of Parliament to pursue plans that have caused dismay and despair, not least to elderly people. I have had people literally in tears in my constituency about the human impact of the project line. I am angry on their behalf, as are other hon. Members, that they have been caused so much despair, dismay and sadness, not least by the arrogant lack of consultation and the bullying approach of Central Railway.

To my surprise, I saw in a local newspaper an article with the headline, "Railway expects yes vote". The article said:

"Central Railway says it is pleasantly surprised at the number of objections to its freight scheme through Croydon—12,000."

Why is it pleasantly surprised? It is because, the company says,

"It amounts to little more than 40 objections per kilometre. For a major scheme of this character one could expect a figure which would run into hundreds per kilometre."

Such is the statistical fantasy land of that toytown company. These are people who would have described Chernobyl as a small bang.

The people of my constituency humbly hope that the House of Commons will represent them today. I believe that we shall. They feel that they are up against a big brother—a big company—but they also know that Parliament means something in our democracy. Very soon we shall show that we speak on behalf of our people by voting resoundingly, decisively and clearly no.

8.37 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): After listening to hon. Members on both sides of the House, I do not wish to try their patience by trying to demolish the already demolished, but I reflect on behalf of my constituents that in the past two or three years they have been subject to two massive infrastructure proposals. The first was the east-west route, which runs plumb across my constituency, and the second is the Central Railway project, which runs across it from north to south. If the two projects go through, my constituency will look like a hot-cross bun.

All that my constituency wants from my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads is a very small and inexpensive bypass at Tingewick, with which I have bored

my hon. Friend on many occasions. Therefore, it is ironic that, instead of that much-needed bypass—people walk in danger of their lives every day—we are presented with two enormous schemes that would dissect the constituency and cause massive environmental problems, among other things.

I shall speak literally for a matter of minutes. Apart from stressing the environmental problems, particularly for Haddenham, the village that would be most damaged if the line was built, I should like to emphasise that there is an air of unreality about these proceedings, not only because there is such a measure of agreement across the House, but because we are discussing, seriously as we must, the whole spatchcocked idea in the first place. This is the type of plan that gives private enterprise a bad name, because it has a strong flavour of speculation. I have not looked up the south sea bubble debate, but no doubt we could have cribbed some terminology from there, had we tried.

I could go on for hours emphasising the pain that this has caused many people in my constituency, but I know that similar pain has been caused to other hon. Members' constituents, so I shall finish with the following thought. I was very pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Minister imply that he would study the procedure under which massive planning applications can be made and cause massive disruption and—as this one has done—massive cost to the Government, when they are merely confetti and not worth the paper on which they are submitted.

8.40 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): There have been some excellent speeches in the debate, which have shown the strength of feeling of hon. Members on both sides of the House. The Minister—I do not criticise him for it—illustrated the genuine anxieties that he and his Department have, not only about the possible funding, but about the overwhelming opposition that has been expressed.

The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley), in a telling speech, ripped apart the argument that has been presented. I represent a constituency in the London borough of Wandsworth. The borough has spent an enormous amount of time and money considering the proposals, and has made countless objections to them.

The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling made certain statements on the documents that he has. I also have one, which I am sure that other hon. Members have, headed:

"Central Railway's Response to Representation and Objections".

It is lies or misinterpretation of what we know has been happening in the constituencies that we represent.

One of the points that the document makes about objections by local authorities is that most of the authorities object to the scheme on the basis that there has been insufficient consultation with them and that the information provided with the application is inadequate; how true. We in Wandsworth, and many of my constituents who are affected, have been trying and trying to find out what the proposals really mean, without great success.

On the third page of the document, there is the following statement:

"Under this scheme homeowners are granted an option to sell their homes to the Company at a fixed price."

Many hon. Members have been through all this before on other proposals, when at the end of the day people whose homes were being compulsorily purchased have had very little say in trying to get what they rightly believed to be the value of their property.

The document next discusses the environmental impact. It says:

"The Company's investigations indicate that the operation of the railway will not create unacceptable increases in noise or vibration".

The London borough of Wandsworth, which has done extensive work on that, says clearly, in documents that have been circulated to the three Members for the borough, that that is totally untrue.

My final point is about disruption during construction. The document says:

"The project has been designed to minimise disruption during construction but some disruption is inevitable."

The Minister said in his opening remarks that there will be seven-day working on much of the project. Do we not have an obligation, not only to look after the blight problem for our constituents, but to look after the general environment in which they live? The hon. Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) spoke of the problems that his constituency has had to suffer as a result of the cross-channel developments.

Very shortly, we shall have the opportunity to vote the order down, and I hope that we shall do so overwhelmingly. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) outlined—

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether you can advise the House as to whether any hon. Member will speak for the scheme tonight.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I am afraid that I cannot anticipate what hon. Members might wish to say.

Mr. Cox: My hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner) makes an important point. We shall watch closely how many hon. Members go into the Aye Lobby tonight, and I do not think that we or the Tellers shall spend much time counting them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood spoke about the time of the overall development. If we have a public inquiry, which will take two years or more, and then the development work, the entire process might take five or six years. None of us has a right to be in the House tonight thinking about our constituents and saying, "Perhaps they will not like it, but we must live with it." I am sure that all of us here tonight who oppose the scheme want to see it defeated in the House. In six months' or a year's time, we shall not be faced with the prospect of the scheme being brought back because it has been changed in some way, if we defeat it tonight in its entirety.

8.45 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I support the strong objections that have been made to the proposal. I am keen for freight to move from road to rail, as I believe the House and the country are, but not in this way. In my constituency, there would be enormous damage to people in their homes, in that they would have trains thundering

[Mr. Harry Greenway]

past close by, day and night, in a way that would damage unacceptably their health and morale and their way of life, beyond repair. In Greenford, Northolt and especially Perivale, there would be destruction of habitats, in addition to the damage to people in their homes.

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Does my hon. Friend realise that there could be not only the five to six trains an hour that Central Railway has mentioned, but as many as 10 trains an hour, if third-party operators are also permitted to use the line?

Mr. Greenway: Yes, I am aware of that, and I am glad that my hon. Friend mentioned it, because it emphasised his opposition to this unwanted, unsatisfactory development.

Many hon. Members want to speak. We all have a duty to represent our constituents' concerns. My constituents expressed their views to me by the thousand, in the form of a petition. Everyone opposed the scheme; no one wrote to me to say that they wanted it. I wish that people could have been informed of their opportunity to write with their objections by 1 July, long before they were given that information. In my constituency, people did not know that they could write and object to the scheme until the middle of June, leaving them with a fortnight. That is unsatisfactory.

The scheme is unsatisfactory in every way. It has been unsatisfactorily presented and mounted, and it has been unsatisfactorily handled throughout the short consultation stage. It should be thrown out unanimously.

8.48 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): I have received the same petition and complaints as many right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken. I want to add to the debate, because there is no point in repeating much of what has been said, simply repeating what many of our constituents are saying.

This application shows the need to review the Transport and Works Act 1992. It is wrong that a company without any convincing financial ability can propose a scheme by drawing a line on the map without adequate consultation with any of the local authorities concerned, let alone other people, and put that scheme in such a way that it blights people's homes and businesses. In doing so, it will make many people lose money on their homes.

This is no way to plan a major infrastructure scheme. No attention has been paid to the height of bridges or to the need to deal with the infrastructure underneath the roads that the railway will cross. A proposal of this nature will put at risk electricity cables and gas and water mains. The Government cannot justify a system in which a minor company makes proposals without adequate thought and planning, and then expects to get it through on the ground that it can spell out the detail later once Parliament has approved it.

I appeal to the Minister to learn from this lesson. The Act must be amended to ensure that a company—

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community Documents).*

The House divided: Ayes 7, Noes 172.

Division No. 213] **[8.50 pm**

AYES

Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
French, Douglas
Gill, Christopher
Leigh, Edward
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Don Foster and
Mr. Robert Hughes.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alton, David
Amess, David
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Austin–Walker, John
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, A J
Bendall, Vivian
Benton, Joe
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burden, Richard
Burns, Simon
Butler, Peter
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Ms Jean
Couchman, James
Cox, Tom
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dicks, Terry
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Elletson, Harold
Faulds, Andrew
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Flynn, Paul
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Gardiner, Sir George
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanley, Jeremy
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Howard, Michael
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hutton, John
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lidington, David
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretf'd)*
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'ld)*
MacGregor, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Maitland, Lady Olga
Marland, Paul
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martlew, Eric
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Meale, Alan
Mellor, David
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Mullin, Chris
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Oliner, Bill
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Pawsey, James
Pearson, Ian
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Ms Dawn

Quin, Ms Joyce
Rathbone, Tim
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rowe, Andrew
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Gillian
Shersby, Sir Michael
Short, Ms Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speed, Sir Keith
Spellar, John
Spink, Dr Robert
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Tipping, Paddy
Tracey, Richard
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Vaz, Keith
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wareing, Robert N
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Robathan and
Mr. Bill Etherington.

Question accordingly negatived.

FINANCE AND SERVICES

Ordered,

That Mr. Greg Knight be discharged from the Finance and Services Committee and Mr. Andrew Mackay be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

PETITIONS

Standard Spending Assessment (North Lincolnshire)

9 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I beg leave of the House to present a petition on behalf of the people of North Lincolnshire regarding the way in which the standard spending assessment is calculated. The campaign has been organised by the local newspaper, the *Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph*. It is supported by the leader of the North Lincolnshire council and by the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), whose constituency covers part of the new unitary authority.

The standard spending assessment calculation led to a council tax increase of 28 per cent. in April this year. We believe that that is an unfair, and a very heavy burden on the people of that area. It has also caused dramatic cuts in services and created enormous problems for the council. The petition reads as follows:

To the House of Commons

The Petition of the people of North Lincolnshire declares that the Standard Spending Assessment that dictates the level of the North Lincolnshire Council Tax is unfair, unreasonable and does not take into account the needs of the area, recognise the balance of its urban and rural nature, and has resulted in an excessive increase in Council Tax.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons carries out an urgent review of the basis of the Standard Spending Assessment.

That issue must be examined urgently—not just in the case of North Lincolnshire but in relation to councils the length and breadth of this country. It is quite clear that there is something seriously wrong with the calculation, and it must be rectified as soon as possible.

To lie upon the Table.

North Western Traffic Area Office, Manchester

9.3 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The right to petition the House of Commons is a very important one which is not lightly abandoned by anyone. Therefore, I am delighted to present to the House tonight a petition on behalf of a small group of important people who run the north western traffic area office in Manchester.

Those hon. Members who know the transport industry know that traffic commissioners are responsible for maintaining and enforcing the laws that keep our constituents safe in relation to public service vehicles, buses and heavy lorries. They have now been told that they are to lose their jobs and that the work is to go elsewhere.

The petition reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament Assembled.

The Humble Petition of the people of Manchester and elsewhere sheweth

that we wish to register strong protest at the Government's proposal to close the North Western Traffic Area Office in Manchester and thereby reduce the levels of vehicle and traffic enforcement in the North West and threaten the employment of some sixty staff.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House do not proceed with this proposal.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Security (Middle East)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

9.5 pm

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): It is a great pleasure and privilege to initiate this Adjournment debate on the important subject of peace prospects in the middle east. I am conscious of the fact that, although the hour is early, at the end of this short debate the House will be going into a long summer recess, when no doubt you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and other right hon. and hon. Members will be able to spend more time with constituents.

Conscious as I am of the fact that, earlier this evening, the House debated the third report of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges on the conduct of hon. Members, I am pleased to report that I have no interest to declare, other than an interest in the subject, but it is a sad reflection on public life in the United Kingdom that those of us who have business interests predating our membership of the House and who are able to draw on experiences in business, socially and otherwise, have felt constrained, as I have in the past four years, from speaking in such debates in recent times. On this important subject, however, it is useful perhaps to put down one or two markers, and I hope to play some small part in furthering the peace process.

The middle east is vital to the interests of the industrialised world, because of its strategic location and unparalleled wealth. Today, the region's future is in the balance. The choice is either for its political elites to continue to initiate constructive dialogue with each other and to marginalise the extremists, or to appease the hardliners, whose best interests are served by the continuing mistrust and confrontation of the past and the failures of the peace process.

Even in Israel, enormous discretion is given to its elite to make public policy. Despite such leeway, trust can be squandered if officials are seen as not protecting their country's national security interest. An aide to Prime Minister Rabin once coined a succinct motto for him:

"If you want to make drastic concessions on peace, you must show the public you can take drastic measures for security".

Prime Minister Rabin declared that Israel would pursue peace as if there were no terrorism, and fight terrorism as if there were no peace process. There is much of such a policy in Israel's new leader. Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu possesses both the credibility with the Israelis and the personal will to make territorial concessions when he is convinced that his state's security is not at stake. Reaching agreement will prove a matter more of timing than anything else.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): May I thank my hon. Friend for not prejudging the Israeli Prime Minister, as so much of the world press did? Does my hon. Friend agree that the lesson of history is that leaders of the right are often better able to make peace than leaders of the left? After all, it was Prime Minister Begin who signed the Camp David accord, and President Nixon was able to warm up relations with the Soviet Union.

Mr. Banks: I was pleased to have the opportunity to give way to my hon. Friend, and I agree with the broad thrust of his remarks. I am certainly one of the last people who would wish to make presumptions about the actions of the Prime Minister of Israel in the days and months ahead.

Prime Minister Netanyahu made an eloquent and articulate speech to the United States Congress earlier this month. I believe that that speech will have allayed the scepticism and consternation felt by a number of Arab leaders following the Israeli elections in May. I hope that it will have contributed towards the gradual expansion of the circle of peace.

The clearing of the air has continued with Arab leaders—most recently with President Mubarak in Cairo on 17 July, and with the Israeli Foreign Minister's visit with President Arafat earlier this week. The promise to allow 10,000 Palestinian workers to enter Israel, despite the existent threat from Muslim militant terrorists in the west bank and Gaza strip, is a welcome sign of Israeli intentions.

To the ordinary Palestinian in the territories, the initiation of constructive dialogue and the marginalisation of the extremists means little. Tangible evidence of the fruits of peace must pervade everyday life—hence the importance of economic development and, in Secretary of State Warren Christopher's words

"not simply to give peace a chance, but to ensure that it will not fail".

Just as the Israeli Government must carry their people with them in the search for peace, so too must the Palestinian authority. Marginalising extremists is made easier by improvements in living standards under a responsible leadership.

The United States and Russian co-sponsored international donors conference in Washington in 1993, the Israel-Palestinian Liberation Organisation economic agreement in Paris in 1994, the work of the ad hoc liaison committee on Palestinian assistance and the conference on assistance to the Palestinians convened earlier this year, have all played their part in initiating such an improvement.

All five of the Madrid multilateral working groups have made significant progress via concrete projects that bear significantly on the long-term peace, stability and prosperity of the region, particularly the work of the regional economic development working group, chaired by the European Union, and the refugee working group, chaired by Canada. Their activities are also fostering new bilateral and private sector initiatives throughout the region.

One of the more significant of those involves the middle east/north Africa economic summits that reached agreement in Amman last year on, among other things, the establishment of a bank for economic co-operation and development in the middle east and north Africa, the establishment of the Regional Business Council, and the formal inauguration of the economic summit executive secretariat.

As for ourselves in the United Kingdom, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will reaffirm the Government's commitment to helping the Palestinian territories through the constructive, helpful methods that have been adopted so far, bilaterally, through the United

Nations, and via the European Union. I know that this country's aid has reached £82 million in the three years up to 1996-97, and the European Union's aid of £400 million over five years—our share being one sixth—is welcome.

I am particularly keen on the fostering and encouragement of private enterprise in the territories, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did much to encourage that end during his visit to the Gaza strip last year. If ordinary Palestinians are able to see an improvement in their living standards in trade, public health, sewerage, finance and administration, it spells trouble for the extremists and terrorists and their recruitment teams.

We already co-operate with both Israel and the Palestinian authority on training for the Palestinian police force, with, for example, the help of a team from the Scottish police training college. I hope that we shall continue to provide such obviously practical and beneficial assistance in the future.

Sometimes we talk about the inner circle of states surrounding Israel and about their importance. Some of the most important of those, of course, are Syria, Jordan and the Palestinian territories. Negotiations between Israel and Syria entered a new phase in 1995, although talks have stalled in the aftermath of terrorist incidents in Israel and the election of the new Israeli Government. However, I believe that the will to reach agreement exists on both sides.

Peace with Syria would almost certainly mean that Israel could have peace with, I hope, all Arab countries, barring one or two indefatigable holdouts such as Libya and Iraq. The Israel-Syrian tract is doubly important, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary stated in a radio interview this April, when he said:

"We know that Syria has enormous influence in Lebanon . . . It is quite clear that the two are quite intimately linked."

What is Syria to gain in the peace process? I believe that the prospect of getting back Golan is of huge political importance. Possibly Syria could gain Israel's consent to its continued overlordship of Lebanon, and it could reasonably expect to be removed from the United States's list of state-sponsored terrorism. If Syria, with its influence over dissident groups, felt able to sign on the dotted line by joining the multilateral talks, for example, I believe that Arab rulers everywhere in the Gulf and in north Africa would feel that they had nothing to fear from doing the same.

Just as the Palestinian deal is the key to a new economic order, so the Syrian deal is the key to a comprehensive peace with the wider Arab world. Coming down from Golan is the key, and—despite the utterances of Prime Minister Rabin and Prime Minister Netanyahu—I believe that the Israeli elite understands that, too, provided that security can be guaranteed.

In the meantime, it is only by marginalising supporters of Islamic Jihad, Hamas and Hezbollah that leaders committed to peace will continue to make progress in the years ahead. International pariahs—such as Libya and, especially, Iran—do most to encourage terrorism, which can, and sometimes does, destabilise other countries in the region. I am particularly concerned about the most recent murderous examples of that fact, in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

The recent European Union agreement on a new extradition convention between member states is a very constructive follow-up to the Prime Minister's statements at the middle east summit in March.

I do not believe that we should tolerate the activities of people such as Dr. Al-Masari, who exploit their roles as asylum seekers to diffuse their evil and malignant opinions, to the detriment of the builders of peace everywhere. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised that issue at the summit.

In view of the significant threat posed by a spiralling arms race and by state-sponsored terrorism, it is imperative that the arms control and regional security working group, chaired by the United States and Russia, reaches substantive agreements, such as that on establishing regional security centres. However, given that the arms procurement policies of countries such as Iran and Libya—which by choice are not involved in peace negotiations—have as much bearing on future security as countries that are involved in the negotiations, any hope of achieving arms control is a dim one.

Iran is still viewed by the United Arab Emirates, for example, as the major threat to security in the region, not least because of the clearly expressed ambitions of its leaders to play the dominant role in regional security. The dispute over Gulf islands, such as Abu Musa, symbolises the confrontation. Unsurprisingly, as Iran refuses arbitration, international diplomacy has been blocked in the matter.

Iran has consistently opposed the Arab-Israel peace process, not only diplomatically but by sponsoring terrorism aimed at destabilising the mutual trust carefully nurtured between Israel and several Arab states since 1991. Moreover, western intelligence has documented reports of Iranian meddling, during this decade, in the internal affairs of Lebanon and of Algeria, and it seems clear that that meddling is spreading to other countries as well—even to the extent of attempting to divide the UAE, for example, by practising direct diplomacy with the individual Emirates rather than through the federal authority.

Iran has proved antagonistic to security in the region. Its programme of weapons acquisition—including, as many fear, efforts to procure nuclear weapons—the expansion of chemical and biological weapons capabilities, the acquisition of more sophisticated missiles and the purchase of three modern diesel-powered submarines from Moscow are all further proof of Iran's aspiration to regional hegemony. Iran is currently experiencing high unemployment and inflation, shortages of consumer goods and currency devaluations, but, despite that, it is spending vast sums on modern military technology.

The view in Abu Dhabi towards security in the region has been one of common sense. It has weighed in with third parties to encourage them to desist from supplying weapons of mass destruction, dual-use high technology and new credits to terrorist regimes, including Iran.

The United Kingdom has been the UAE's staunchest ally since independence in 1971. As a frequent visitor and secretary of the Anglo-UAE parliamentary group, it would be remiss of me not to say that I firmly believe in the successful conclusion of a defence co-operation agreement between the United Kingdom and the UAE, especially as a means of providing a framework for future bilateral defence collaboration.

[Mr. Banks]

Although I appreciate that the content of negotiations is confidential and most certainly very delicate, I hope that my right hon. Friend will assure me and the House that the Government are doing their utmost to build on our long-standing friendship which has existed since 1971.

As for international trade, with a total population of some 359 million, the countries of north Africa and the middle east had a combined gross domestic product of some £601 billion in 1993, and imported £135 billion-worth of goods. The region remains one of enormous importance for British trade. Many businesses in my constituency export to the middle east, and I know that trade with the region is also important for the constituencies of other hon. Members. It is important to remember that 6 per cent. of exports worldwide are with the region, and that it shows a balance of trade of 2:1 in the UK's favour.

The Gulf also continues to offer enormous prospects in all sectors, and there are also new opportunities in Israel, the territories and Jordan arising from the peace process. Lebanon and Syria may also benefit once there is progress on the Syrian track. In the meantime, reconstruction in Lebanon and the liberalisation of the Syrian economy mean that markets are worthy of attention in their own right. I am pleased to learn that British companies are getting in there and trying to win orders. I trust that they will continue to receive the support of our posts abroad and of Ministers at home, and of Ministers when they travel.

Security in the middle east is still far away. Continuing and regular threats to long-term security are posed by extremism and terrorism throughout the region. I hope that the day will come when all disputes in the middle east can be settled in the peaceful and brotherly manner which I like to think we are seeing in the border dispute between Bahrain and Qatar, which is being brokered by the Saudi Arabians.

It has been well said that it is easier to make war than peace. It will take concerted international leadership and, of course, the will of the people themselves to ensure that peace and its dividends remain the only viable future option. I know that my right hon. Friend is playing his part, on behalf of the Government, in providing our share of that leadership. He has my full support in that task.

9.23 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) for raising this important topic. He touched on many issues and perhaps I can put some of his remarks into a wider context.

As my hon. Friend said, this is the final debate of the current Session. It is appropriate that an area as important as the middle east should be the subject of that debate. It is also the third Adjournment debate to which I have replied today and I am pleased that this hat trick should be recorded on such a subject.

It is vital to fundamental British interests that there should be peace and tranquillity in the middle east, not merely because, as a permanent member of the Security Council, our aim is to promote stability throughout the world. In the middle east that concern is also linked to some long-standing friendships. Our profound economic and commercial interests and the safety of tens of thousands of British expatriates are forefront in our minds. So my honourable Friend should not be surprised if we accord a high priority to our interest in regional security. We showed in the Gulf war how far we were prepared to go in opposing threats to that interest and attacks on our friends.

The middle east peace process is a linchpin of our regional security policy. Many recent statements have confirmed our strong interest in the search for a comprehensive regional peace settlement. They include my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary's speech to the charity Medical Aid for Palestinians on 23 May and, more recently, the G7 declaration at Lyons and the European Union's Florence declaration. It is now most important that the agreements that have been made are implemented by all parties. For the Israelis, that means in the first instance the commitment to deploy from Hebron.

The other immediate imperatives are relaxations of the closures of the West Bank and Gaza and the resumption of high-level contacts between the Israelis and the Palestinians. I welcome the meeting that has taken place between Foreign Minister Levy and President Arafat. I have every confidence that Israel—with its new Government—and the Arab world will work for peace. That is vital to us all. As my hon. Friend said, the new Israeli Government must be given time to formulate their policies.

We recognise that security is a vital priority for Israel. We are working hard—in counter-terrorism, for example—to ensure that security and the peace process are seen as inter-related. Ultimately, the only answer to the problem of security is a comprehensive and lasting settlement between Israel and her Arab neighbours, based on the principle of land for peace, which respects the rights of all.

The principle of land for peace was put forward in United Nations Security Council resolution 242, back in 1967. It was the basis for the Madrid process, which began in 1991, and for the Oslo talks which resulted in the declaration of principles between Israel and the PLO, signed in 1993. Britain gave consistent and full support to both of those declarations. The declaration of principles has led to the signing of the Gaza-Jericho agreement in 1994, and most recently in September last year of the interim agreement.

Not only has Yasser Arafat, the chairman of the PLO, renounced violence, but he has been instrumental in the important decision of the Palestine National Council of 24 April 1996 to amend the Palestinian Covenant so that it no longer denies the right of Israel to exist.

We shall have a major role to play in helping to maintain the momentum of the peace process. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said on 15 July to the General Affairs Council in Brussels, we must not allow the peace process to slip between the fingers of the world, like sand, and be lost. As I have said already, that cannot be allowed to happen.

An important main part of our support for the peace process is our economic assistance to the Palestinian people.

Mr. John Marshall: In the 62 minutes available to my right hon. Friend, will he talk briefly about the fate of the missing in action Israeli soldiers and airmen such as Ron Arad and Zachary Baumel? He will know that the remains of two Israeli MIAs were returned recently. May we have an assurance that the British Government will continue to press at every opportunity in an attempt to ensure that the fate of the other MIAs is determined very quickly?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I can give him that assurance. When I was in Israel in January, I raised the subject of the six persons missing in action not only, of course, with Israelis but with President Arafat himself. We discussed the issues in great depth and I believe that Yasser Arafat wants a resolution of the matter as much as anyone. I will continue to raise the subject. In fact, I have in my briefcase a dog tag with the six names of those who are missing. That two of those have been returned dead is no satisfaction. The fact that their fate is now known is in a way a relief to the loved ones, but it is quite terrible that the fate of those who are still missing is unknown. It is possible that Ron Arad is still alive. We will need to address the matter and constantly raise it with all those who might have influence.

In the context of the middle east, I might also add that the situation of any people who are missing in action must be resolved and information given. I think of course of the 600 Kuwaitis who are still missing in Iraq. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) for raising a humanitarian issue that needs to be resolved.

As I said, the Palestinian people require our economic assistance. I was proud to attend the Palestinian donors conference in Paris earlier this year. We are giving £87 million between 1994 and 1997. I believe that it is money well spent. Even the Israelis agree that a prosperous Palestine is a more peaceful Palestine.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister indicated at the Sharm el-Sheikh conference in March, such aid can draw away support from extremism fuelled by poverty. Much of it has helped to build up the Palestinian civil police. While that approach focuses on human rights concerns and good policing tactics, it helps to increase confidence among the Palestinian public in their Administration and contributes to the formation of a stable and forward-looking Palestinian democracy.

I would also like to speak briefly about Syria, which my hon. Friend the Member for Southport raised. I recently visited Damascus. We greatly hope that the talks between Syria and Israel, which were suspended earlier this year, can be taken forward at an early opportunity. Syria remains central to the ultimate success of the middle east peace process and we welcome the fact that Mr. Netanyahu has said that he wants to resume those negotiations. Syria has made great progress away from confrontation with Israel and the west towards the search for a peaceful solution.

We also support the strengthening of Syria's links with Europe and welcomed its participation in the Barcelona conference last year. We hope that it will be possible to negotiate an association agreement between the European Community and Syria at an early opportunity, further developing trade and economic links. Very recently, we had a most successful day at the CBI discussing trade relations with Syria. Syria's greater integration into the region and internationally is very important for the long-term stability of the middle east. It would be in no one's interest for Syria to be isolated.

Iraq continues to pose a serious threat to regional security. Saddam Hussein has shown quite clearly that he retains ambitions to dominate the area. We must ensure that he can never do so again and maintain pressure on Iraq to comply fully with all relevant United Nations resolutions, including, as I mentioned, by accounting for all Kuwaiti and other prisoners of war. Until that happens, sanctions must stay in place.

It is particularly alarming that Iraq continues to obstruct the work of the UN Special Commission on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. The commission's last report to the Security Council in April made clear that major gaps in its knowledge of Iraq's weapons programmes remain. Iraq's repeated obstruction, despite tough warnings from the Security Council, strongly suggests that Iraq is still trying to protect its weapons of mass destruction capability. Saddam's refusal to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions has cruelly prolonged the plight of the Iraqi people. To alleviate their suffering Britain co-sponsored Security Council resolution 986 which allows Iraq to sell £1 billion worth of oil every 90 days to purchase humanitarian goods. The resolution was adopted in April 1995; but, sadly, Saddam refused to implement it until May this year. We hope the Iraqi people will see the benefits very shortly.

We remain deeply concerned about Iranian ambitions in the middle east. We believe that its weapons of mass destruction programmes and ambitions are a major threat to regional security. We are not reassured by the Iranians' history of interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Their hostility to the middle east peace process, anti-Israeli rhetoric and support for Hezbollah is also deeply concerning.

Our friends in the Gulf recognise the threat posed by Iran. The recent arrests in Bahrain and elsewhere in the region of members of Hezbollah's small cells linked to Iran has served to highlight this problem yet again. Our Gulf friends will continue to have our full support.

Our own relations with Iran are conducted within the framework of the European Union's critical dialogue, established by the European Council in 1992 to engage Iran on key areas of concern: in particular its hostility to the middle east peace process, support for terrorism, weapons programmes, appalling human rights record and the continuing threat to Salman Rushdie's life. Our objective is to bring about an improvement in Iranian behaviour through sustained, concerted pressure. The council made it clear that progress in these areas would be important in determining the extent to which closer relations with Iran could be developed.

Some commentators underestimate the contribution made by the Gulf nations themselves to securing regional stability. As owners of nearly half the known oil reserves and situated in a volatile region—neighbouring Iran and Iraq—the Gulf states have delivered stability and a high level of development and prosperity to their citizens. These are no mean achievements. It is easy for people to scoff and say that oil wealth made such progress inevitable: I do not believe that to be true. We recognise that the amazing transformation which has been wrought in the Gulf on the back of oil wealth is a tribute to the Governments concerned.

[Mr. Hanley]

Infrastructure has been created where none existed before: roads, hospitals, schools, water, power—the list goes on. There has also been investment in diversification, to prepare for the time when oil revenues decline. There has been a substantial record of achievement.

The Gulf states have also made a considerable contribution to regional security. The Gulf Co-operation Council is a symbol of their determination to maintain their independence in the face of any threats. Its military development, including the establishment of a common defensive force, the peninsula shield, continues to make progress. This Government strongly support the GCC, which has played, and continues to play, a vital part in maintaining regional peace and stability.

The GCC has also exercised a constructive influence through its foreign policy. Whether in terms of the middle east peace process, Iran or Iraq, the GCC has consistently sought to advance the cause of peace and stability. We may not agree on every last detail, although our policies are broadly similar. But we are in no doubt that the GCC should be commended for its responsible approach.

We have major trading interests in the Gulf. Saudi Arabia is our largest market in the middle east and one of our largest outside the OECD. Our exports amounted to £1.6 billion in 1995 and continue to increase. Our trade with the United Arab Emirates is not far behind, at £1.2 billion in 1995. The remaining Gulf states also represent very significant markets. In total, 12 per cent. of the UK's exports outside the EU go to the Gulf. Tens of thousands of British jobs and hundreds of British businesses depend on this trade.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southport dealt in particular with the United Arab Emirates. The UAE is one of our closest allies in the Gulf and we enjoy excellent relations. Following our withdrawal from the area formerly known as the Trucial states in 1971, we concluded a bilateral treaty of friendship which has remained the cornerstone of our co-operation to date.

I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the amazing transformation that has occurred in the UAE since 1971, largely due to the wise leadership of the Emirates sheiks, and in particular to President Zayed. There were some siren voices in 1971 who predicted that the UAE could never prosper as a cohesive entity, and that it would not be able to support itself. But those voices were silenced by the steady transformation of the small desert territories into modern oases of industry and commerce. The UAE now enjoys an enviable economic situation, with a GDP of around $18,000 per capita per annum, and a burgeoning infrastructure to support its population.

The UAE's success story goes beyond economics. Twenty-five years after its foundation, the federation now enjoys a permanent constitution, an active federal national council and intra-Emirate co-operation in a whole range of matters. Anyone who has visited the UAE—as I did last November—can appreciate the co-operation which binds the Emirates together while respecting their different traditions. As they approach the 25th anniversary of the founding of the federation, the UAE's leaders can be justifiably proud of their achievements to date.

Our bilateral links go far beyond trade—important as that is. The United Kingdom remains a favourite destination for Emiratis whom we welcome each year for business, leisure or health care. Around 30,000 Britons live and work in the UAE—including my stepbrother. This day-to-day co-operation rarely makes the headlines, but it is indicative of the health of our relations.

We also co-operate closely in defence matters. We understand the UAE's security concerns—notably the threat of aggression from Iran. We are concerned by the on-going dispute between the UAE and Iran over Abu Musa and the Tunbs islands, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Southport referred. As British Ministers have made clear before, we support the UAE's proposal to refer the issue to the International Court of Justice. We call on Iran to engage in constructive dialogue over the future of the islands, and to refrain from any actions which might alter the delicate status quo. Recent history in the Gulf has demonstrated that aggression finds no rewards and Iran would do well to listen to the message of history.

As with our other Gulf allies, we are co-operating with the UAE in the development of its military capability. We provide the UAE with loan service personnel working directly with the UAE armed forces. We are negotiating a defence co-operation agreement that would provide a framework for our existing defence co-operation. Although we have agreed on the majority of the text, we are working to finalise a number of points. As we work towards conclusion of the defence arrangement, our friends in the UAE can be in no doubt about our commitment to their security and that of the Gulf region.

Finally, I should like to take this opportunity to say a word to those who speak loosely of the threat from Islam against the west. This is nonsense. Islam has its extremists, as we do in the west. The Al-Khobar bombing was a salutary reminder of their existence. We must work together with our Islamic friends against this menace. Regional peace and tranquillity can only be preserved by a close partnership, and we have much in common.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes to Ten o'clock till Monday 14 October, pursuant to Resolution [22 July].

House of Commons

Monday 14 October 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

DEATH OF A MEMBER

Madam Speaker: I regret to have to report to the House the death of Terry Patchett Esq., Member for Barnsley, East. I am sure that hon. Members of all parties will join me in mourning the loss of a colleague and in extending our sympathy to the family and friends of the hon. Gentleman.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Museums and Galleries

1. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much her Department is spending in the current financial year on capital projects at museums and galleries. [37920]

8. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the funding of museums and galleries. [37930]

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): The 17 museums and galleries sponsored by my Department will receive over £205 million in grant in aid. The lottery has made 139 awards totalling over £250 million to capital projects at museums and galleries. The Government's position on the funding of museums and galleries was recently set out in "Treasures in Trust". Copies were sent to hon. Members and placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Mans: Has any of that money gone to service museums and, in particular, to any museum in Lancashire?

Mr. Skinner: It has all gone to Gilbert and Sullivan.

Mrs. Bottomley: I hope that it will be possible in due course for lottery money to go to Gilbert and Sullivan and the D'Oyly Carte, but its arm's-length relationship with the Arts Council is not a matter for me to comment on. I am sure that many hon. Members would favour that proposal strongly.

I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) that a substantial amount has gone to service museums, including £6.5 million to the imperial war museum's new American air museum at Duxford and £61,000 to the King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment museum in Lancaster.

Mr. Pope: The Secretary of State mentioned "Treasures in Trust", which made no reference to the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering in local authority museums. Can she assure the House that CCT will not be introduced?

Mrs. Bottomley: There are no plans to introduce CCT in local authority museums. The document is an excellent framework for the standards for which we should all be looking in museums, ranging from the great national museums to the equally important local museums. It is a timely account and a spur to action which I hope will unite the House.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: May I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the welcome donation to the museum in Lancaster? It is a superb museum already, but it will be infinitely better when it is

finished. At the last Armistice day, there was avid talk about what improvements could be made to the museum, and these can now be made.

Madam Speaker: Order. This is Question Time. I did not hear a question.

Dame Elaine Kellett–Bowman: I said, "Would she accept my thanks?"

Madam Speaker: Order. That is hardly the sort of pertinent question that we get in this House. If the Secretary of State wishes to make a brief comment, I will accept it but I would like to hear questions in future.

Mrs. Bottomley: I accept the thanks of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett–Bowman), and I should add that that museum uses a lot of volunteers. Volunteers are the life-blood of museums, which are the focal point of many communities. I hope that the additional resources from the national lottery will lead to greater use of museums by both young and old.

Mr. Fisher: Do not these figures reveal the truth—that the Government are using the receipts from the national lottery to conceal and compensate for their inadequacy in meeting the capital needs of the galleries and museums for which the Secretary of State is responsible? Are they not covering up for the past 17 years of neglect? Did not the Prime Minister promise that lottery money would not be used in that way? Is that not yet another broken promise from the Prime Minister?

Mrs. Bottomley: One of the most enjoyable features of recent months has been watching the Labour party's agony as it tries to cope with the formidable success of the national lottery, which has produced more money than anyone expected. If Labour had had its way, it would have increased operating costs, reduced the amount of money going to good causes and meddled with the distribution. I am delighted that, in addition to the £205 million given to the key 17 museums, a further £250 million has been provided by the lottery. As the document sets out, another £500 million is likely to be provided between now and the end of the century.

Tourism

3. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many tourists visited Britain in the first six months of (a) 1996 and (b) 1995. [37924]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The latest figures indicate that there were 11.8 million visits to the UK by overseas tourists in the first half of this year. That is an increase of nearly 14 per cent. on the 10.4 million visitors to the UK during the same period in 1995.

Mr. Coombs: I thank my right hon. Friend for that encouraging answer, which demonstrates once again that a small island like Britain can hold up its head and compete successfully with the fine weather giants of the tourism industry. What lessons does she think that we might learn from the fact that Euro 96 was a success not merely for London, where most tourists usually go, but for the regions as well? How can we build on that success?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend, who is extremely knowledgeable on these matters, is right: Euro 96 was a formidable success. Our earnings for overseas tourism in June this year were £1.2 billion—20 per cent. higher than for the same month last year. I have asked David Quarmby, chairman of the British Tourist Authority, and the English tourist board to chair a group with people from the sports, museums and arts worlds to find out how we can do more to promote British tourism by building on many of our great sports and arts events.

Dr. John Cunningham: In respect of the right hon. Lady's recent activities on tourism, does she recall that the day before the House rose in July the Prime Minister told us

> "No one can buy access to Ministers"?—[*Official Report*, 23 July 1996; Vol. 282, c. 144.]

Why then did the right hon. Lady charge tourism industry people £500 each to have breakfast with her last week in Bournemouth? The letter sent to people clearly states:

> "For £500 you would be able to discuss issues of concern to you . . . over breakfast with Virginia Bottomley and members of her National Heritage team."

Is that proper? Does it not make the Prime Minister's statement to the House in July absolute rubbish?

Mrs. Bottomley: Anyone who thought the only way to speak to me was to pay £500 would be wasting a great deal of money. It is well understood that I am only too easy to meet in any number of settings, particularly in the tourism industry, where there is huge potential. The meeting was very successful. It is my understanding that if one wants to go to one of the Labour party's nosh-ups in Park lane, one has to pay £1,000.

Mr. Gale: Tourists to the United Kingdom in 1995 and 1996 will in the main have been spared exposure to the sort of hard-core pornography in our hotels that they might experience elsewhere on the continent. What steps will my right hon. Friend take to ensure that the rest of the residents of the United Kingdom are also spared such exposure?

Mrs. Bottomley: I have already made an order proscribing a recent porn satellite channel; that makes it a criminal offence to sell equipment and smart cards or to market or provide any programme material for such channels. With the huge development of cable, satellite and television channels in this country we will not be a centre for filth and pornography and I intend to take every action to make that clear.

Rugby Union

4. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what funds she provides for the support of rugby union. [37925]

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): The Sports Council, which is funded by my Department, provided £125,558 in

support of rugby union football in England in 1995-96, of which £80,000 went to the Rugby Football Union for the development of the game at grass-roots level and £45,558 for the development of the game in the regions. In addition, since November 1992, Sportsmatch has awarded nearly £1.4 million for grass-roots rugby union schemes in England and £201,747 for those in Scotland, which has been matched by a similar sum from businesses.

Mr. Kirkwood: The Minister's well-known concern for and interest in the game are acknowledged. I have even seen him recently at Border Sevens competitions and that is welcome—I am sure that it was in the course of his ministerial duties. However, the large amount of new money that has found its way into the game has come in at a national level. None has reached the junior clubs or the district level of the sport. The welcome work that the Government have done in creating new opportunities through academies of sport and all the rest has been at the elite end of the sports world. The sums that the Minister announced are welcome, but can he not do more and find more resources to produce extra facilities for the junior clubs and the district level, which after all is the level at which future stars are bred?

Mr. Sproat: I will certainly use my good offices, such as they are. Even as we speak, the home countries rugby football unions are discussing with the television authorities the money that they might get from televising games. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about wanting as much as possible of that money to go to youth and district sport and about ensuring that clubs that he knows well, such as Hawick, Gala, Jed Forest, Melrose and Kelso, do not fall out of the game because they are in towns with small populations. I hope that the professional game would never drive out their great tradition of rugby.

Sir Donald Thompson: Does my hon. Friend agree that the best thing that he could do would be to knock a few heads in rugby union together? Both the professional sports association and the RFU have seriously embarrassed us in the past year. Will my hon. Friend take note of what the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) said and ensure that the money goes to the grass-roots until the big boys learn how to behave themselves?

Mr. Sproat: I will do everything I can that is proper to ensure that the governing bodies know the view of the Government—and, indeed, of the House—that as much as possible of the money that they get from television sports rights should go into youth sport.

National Lottery

5. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the total sum paid in prizes and the total sum contributed to charitable and community causes since the establishment of the national lottery. [37926]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: As at 7 October, Camelot had paid a total of £3.032 billion in prize money. The National Lottery Charities Board has made 4,757 awards for a total of £318.4 million to charities and voluntary organisations. In addition, more than 85 per cent. of all lottery awards made so far have gone to charities or voluntary organisations.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Do not these enormous sums demonstrate how unfair the critics of the national lottery have been? In offering my right hon. Friend my sincere congratulations on a fantastic achievement, I ask her to ensure that as much as possible of that money goes to good causes in Southend-on-Sea.

Mrs. Bottomley: As we have passed the 100th national lottery draw, we have the opportunity to take stock and see how lottery awards are falling in constituents across the country. In my hon. Friend's constituency, eight awards, amounting to £1.25 million, have been made—from the tennis club, to the Jewish youth centre, to an art gallery and to a cricket club. I have sent all hon. Members a copy of the leaflet "It could be your good cause" so that those who feel that their constituencies have not understood the opportunities inherent in the national lottery can offer advice and encouragement to take them.

Mr. Faulds: Has the right hon. Lady yet established, or will she be establishing, or will she be getting one of her ministerial colleagues to establish, an investigation into the appalling social and economic damage that the national lottery is doing to the poorer families in every one of our constituencies? These are the people who most need to dream this unrealisable dream.

Mrs. Bottomley: I respect any hon. Member who believes that we should continue to monitor the effect of the national lottery, but there is very careful observation of it. The family expenditure survey last year suggested that the average weekly household spend is £2.30, which is not excessive. When one considers the good that is being done to causes up and down the country and the number of charities, and sports and arts projects—especially in inner-city areas—that have benefited, one has to accept that overall the lottery has had a monumentally good effect on the country.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: Despite the publicity to which my right hon. Friend referred, does she feel that the full potential of the national lottery has yet been appreciated by many community groups and will she consider the possibility of more direct advertising, perhaps on television, to bring home to them their opportunities to apply?

Mrs. Bottomley: I will consider all options because I want every group to understand how to access the money. It is interesting that bowls clubs have benefited from the national lottery. I understand that that is because they were circulated about the application procedures. I welcomed the results from our Building Communities Week this year, in which we went to various parts of the country, especially those which I believed had not yet realised the full potential of the national lottery, and not only to areas which were clear success stories. Together with all the distributing bodies, I will make further efforts to ensure that, if there are parts of the country that have not yet achieved the full benefit from the lottery, they will have the information to do so.

Dr. John Cunningham: Did the right hon. Lady approve the speech of her right hon. Friend the Deputy

Prime Minister at Bournemouth last week, when he said that, after 1999, it was his intention to use Millennium Commission money to fund information technology projects in schools? As the right hon. Gentleman is simultaneously proposing that, after 1999, Millennium Commission money should be used to shore up the millennium exhibition, which seems to be escalating out of control, and since that money cannot be spent twice, which of those projects of the Deputy Prime Minister does she support?

Mrs. Bottomley: The answer is yes: I did approve of what my right hon. Friend said. He said that there was a commitment to make good any difficulties concerning the millennium festival through Millennium Commission funds before allocating them to a further purpose. It is important, however, to make sure that the operating company for the festival is properly established and that good value for money is achieved. I have no doubt that it will be a magnificent festival which will set an example to the world in the year 2000.

Heritage Green Paper

6. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on progress on consultation on the heritage Green Paper. [37927]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The closing date for response to the consultation paper "Protecting our Heritage" was 30 September. A substantial number of comments have been received. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I are studying them carefully.

Dr. Twinn: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer and for the money from the Millennium Commission that has already been given to enhance our architectural heritage through the Church Floodlighting Trust. Has my right hon. Friend had any consultations about the importance of our historic churches and chapels? Does she agree that they often represent the most significant part of our local architectural heritage? Will she support them in order to maintain that heritage for the future?

Mrs. Bottomley: I can indeed give my hon. Friend great encouragement. Apart from the Millennium Commission funding for church projects, the heritage lottery fund has already made 104 awards. Later this week, English Heritage, together with the heritage lottery fund, will announce an extremely welcome further initiative to streamline assistance for churches and to add significantly to the resources available for that. I think churches are part of our national heritage and that that announcement will be an extremely popular further development.

Mr. Dalyell: Could the House have a rather less frivolous answer to the first important question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham)? If there is to be consultation, are we to assume that those who pay £500, or whatever, for breakfast, or whatever, are entitled to privileged access over those who take part in the established civil service view of consultation—the kind of precedent that has been set hitherto by the civil service in serious consultations? Is money going to buy the Minister's ear?

Mrs. Bottomley: The right hon. Member for Copeland had a very serious answer from me: I am available at virtually every major tourist event and I am only too happy to hear directly from people about their concerns and about the real issues. I find that a great number of people are extremely worried about Labour's tourism taxes and the threat that they would pose to a very important industry. A great number of new jobs are expected to be created in that industry, but they would be jeopardised by the minimum wage and the social chapter. It is quite simple: the Conservative party, like the Labour party, and even like the Liberal party, organises a number of events that are sponsored. A sponsored event is such that the meeting is open to anyone who wants to pay £7.50 for breakfast.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, welcome as her answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) was, the fact remains that churches are paying more in value added tax than they receive in grants from English Heritage, important as those grants are? Will my right hon. Friend talk to her Treasury colleagues in the next few weeks to try to ensure that something is done to put that right?

Mrs. Bottomley: I find myself having many close discussions with the Treasury at this time of year and I shall seek to ensure that my hon. Friend's comments are added to them. My hon. Friend has made a crucial contribution to the step change in the amount of money available to churches. Many congregations feel that they would rather raise money for the poor and any number of other good causes and are worried about the amount of money that goes into preserving their buildings. The initiative will be a proper and popular use of lottery money.

BSkyB

7. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to encourage BSkyB to invest in programme making; and if she will make a statement. [37929]

Mr. Sproat: Broadcasters will need to invest in programming if they are to attract viewers in the increasingly diverse and competitive television market. The Government have no plans to introduce further regulation of cable and satellite broadcasters.

Mr. Mullin: That is a disappointing and naive answer. The Minister is surely aware that Sky Television has invested virtually nothing in original programming other than sport and news and has very few plans to do so. Is there not a danger that, ultimately, Mr. Murdoch will drag his television competitors down to the same level as he has dragged his competitors in British journalism? While we are on the subject, the Minister will also be aware that Mr. Murdoch will shortly obtain monopoly access to

digital television. I know that the Minister has received strong representations on the subject from the BBC and ITV. Does he have plans to do anything about that?

Mr. Sproat: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question is no. The answer to his second question is that I shall consider the matter carefully in light of what the BBC, in particular, said last week.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Will my hon. Friend note that Granada Television has become part of BSkyB's package? It launched seven new channels on 1 October—many of the programmes that it makes are made in Manchester, which is good news and a boost for jobs in the north-west.

Mr. Sproat: What my hon. Friend says is true: it is good news. We must remember that this country has become the satellite capital of Europe, and we want to keep it that way.

Mr. Grocott: Does the Minister agree that any investment in programming by BSkyB would be bad news for the viewer if it was investment to obtain further exclusive coverage of major national sporting events? As he joins me and the rest of the House in congratulating Damon Hill on his magnificent achievement yesterday, will he acknowledge the simple truth that the reason why it was a major event of national interest was precisely that it was available to everyone on television? There would not have been the same interest had the event been confined to an exclusive minority channel, available to a few hundred thousand subscribers. What steps is he taking to ensure that major sporting events remain available for the majority of viewers?

Mr. Sproat: I am sure that the whole House will want to offer tremendous congratulations to Damon Hill on his magnificent achievement.

As for the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question—that matter was debated at great length during the passage of the Broadcasting Bill. The hon. Gentleman will know that the listed events have been protected and that there is now a code that means that any important athletic event, such as the Five Nations, will be shown on free-to-air as well as pay television. I believe that the House reached the right conclusions at the time and we have no plans to change them.

Mr. Congdon: Does my hon. Friend agree that cable and satellite television have significantly extended the range and choice of television programmes available to the public of this country? Does he agree that they have provided much extra sport on television and, more important, have ensured that significant extra resources have been made available to sports, particularly football?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend is right. Access to watch sporting events has greatly increased. The amount of money that has come into the sport will benefit it enormously. Some £700-odd million has been invested in soccer. The rugby deal is still being discussed—£87.5 million is already on the cards—and £40-odd million is to go to cricket.

In answer to the earlier question of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), I hope that a lot of the money will go to youth sport.

Soccer

9. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions she has had this season with the Football Association about the current problems facing premier league soccer. [37931]

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have regular meetings with the governing bodies of football.

Mr. Banks: I am very reassured by that answer. As the sweeper in the ministerial team, is the hon. Gentleman succeeding in communicating some of the problems that affect premier football at the moment? He mentioned the £700 million that BSkyB is putting in, which is going to a limited number of clubs. The admission price excludes many people, and the Marc Bosman judgment has implications for the domestic transfer market. Those are all serious matters, causing football supporters concern, and I hope that the Minister will show some concern himself.

I hope that, if the Minister does nothing else this week, he pays close attention to the welfare of British supporters travelling with their clubs to European cup competitions. When Manchester United went to Turkey—it will return this week—its supporters were used for baton practice by the Turkish police. Will he ensure that British travelling supporters are well looked after?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman raises an extremely important point. What happened to Manchester United the last time it visited Turkey was disgraceful, but that is unusual. Leeds at Eindhoven was another example. But by and large—I have investigated this matter as far as I can—there is no evidence that British fans are picked on when they go abroad. I very much hope that Manchester United fans get a smooth passage, as they wish.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend join me in condemning the yobbo-like behaviour of the Aston Villa goalkeeper on Saturday? Does he agree that yobbo-like behaviour by premier league players can only encourage yobbo-like behaviour in the crowds?

Mr. Sproat: I agree with my hon. Friend without reservation.

Mr. Pendry: The Minister will be aware that the present Government have failed to provide any significant structural or financial support to the hosting of the Euro 96 football tournament. He will also be aware that the Football Association plans to bring the World cup here in the year 2006. Will he therefore be more proactive, and seek a meeting with the FA to discuss its problems and offer practical support?

The Minister, Euro-sceptic or not, might like to consider the approach of the French, who are hosting the next World cup. They have established an interministerial committee, based in their Prime Minister's office, to co-ordinate their World cup activities. Or must we accept that only under a Labour Government will a World cup bid receive such positive support?

Mr. Sproat: We will give every possible promotional help to the FA or to the other football authorities in the

United Kingdom, to help them bring the World cup here. In the past few days, I had a discussion with Mr. David Davis about that matter, and we have arranged to hold a further meeting, at which I and other members of the FA can decide what best may be done.

Public Libraries

10. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the level of book loans from public libraries over the last year. [37932]

Mr. Sproat: The total number of book loans in English public libraries was 450.5 million in 1994-95, the latest year for which confirmed figures are available.

Mr. Amess: Does my hon. Friend agree that the library service is cherished throughout the country? That being the case, does he share my disappointment that Labour and Liberal-controlled Essex county council cut the libraries' budget by £1 million, thus raiding the book fund for the first time in living memory, meaning that no new books could be purchased in the current year, including my own?

Mr. Sproat: Yes. It was very disappointing indeed that that was done, not least because the amount that is spent on libraries throughout England—about £500 million—has actually increased by 2 per cent. in real terms on average in the country as a whole, so it was a pity that Essex was not able to follow what other authorities apparently were doing. However, I pay tribute to the efficiency and courtesy of my local Essex public library, in Frinton-on-Sea.

National Lottery

11. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking to stop under–age participation in the national lottery. [37933]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have directed the Director General of the National Lottery not to license games which, in his opinion, do not have sufficient controls to prevent the participation of young people under the age of 16.

Mr. MacShane: Is the Secretary of State aware that, for the public, one of the most disturbing aspects of this sleaze-ridden Government is their complete indifference to under-age gambling? She may be aware that the Office of the National Lottery and the *British Medical Journal* have both recently published reports showing the number of 12 to 15-year-olds gambling on the national lottery.

Is she aware, in the light of her statement, that Camelot last year terminated only one retail outlet for under-age gambling? What steps is she taking to ensure that our children keep their pocket money in their pockets instead of swelling the already swollen profits of Camelot?

Mrs. Bottomley: I agree that it is quite wrong that children who are under age should play the national lottery. The director general has repeatedly reinforced that message to Camelot. I can inform the hon. Gentleman that two retailers have lost their licences and another has been suspended. That can have a powerful effect, since the value to a retailer of having a lottery outlet averages £8,750 a year.

I am encouraged by Dr. Sue Fisher's second report, which suggests that fewer under-age children are playing the lottery. It is of course wrong that any should, or that they should buy cigarettes or alcohol. The enforcement measures are similar, and require trading standards officers and police commitment as well as renewed energy on the part of the director general of Oflot and Camelot.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is another sense in which we want to encourage the participation of young people in the national lottery? It was the idea of the founding fathers and mothers of the national lottery that a large sum of money should be used to provide artistic and sporting outlets that would take young people off the streets and away from the temptations of juvenile crime. Can she report good news on that front?

Mrs. Bottomley: I certainly can. I announced only last week that directions will shortly be issued to enable lottery money to go to revenue grants for young people in sport and the arts, to encourage participation and to promote excellence. The Millennium Commission has already announced an award to Operation Raleigh, which particularly involves young people; and about £7.5 million has been given in the form of 257 awards to children's play projects and children's charities. Thus, in many ways, the lottery is providing worthwhile activities for young people.

Mr. Pike: Has not Camelot expressed the view, as regards its scratch cards, that it would be quite happy to have the playing age raised to 18 because it recognises the problems associated with them?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am not aware of Camelot's having expressed any such view, but I believe that the whole of the national lottery should be kept under review. It is carefully regulated by Oflot, but if we reach a stage where it needs further regulation or controls, I shall certainly implement them. I am, however, mindful of the fact that the Select Committee's comment on this subject endorsed the Government's position.

National Lottery Sport Awards

12. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many awards from national lottery proceeds have been made to individual potential sportsmen; on the basis of which criteria; how much has been the average award; and if she will make a statement. [37934]

Mr. Sproat: None as yet. The Sports Council has recently undertaken a nationwide consultation exercise to help it determine and develop the proposed schemes and priorities It will announce the new arrangements shortly.

Mr. Greenway: I welcome the progress that my hon. Friend has made in this area. Does he agree that good sportsmen who achieve a great deal internationally give a good lead to lesser sportsmen and children who are not

very good at games? How much will be spent in total on assisting gifted athletes and sportsmen to success? Will he bear in mind that Charlotte Dutton, a leading snowboarder, and Ryan Cadogan, both of Ealing, lead their respective fields in the 15 age group?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend has been in touch with me about both his constituents. I congratulate him on his assiduity. We shall have to wait until the Sports Council makes its announcement about how much money will be spent, but I expect about £10 million to £15 million to be set aside to help young sportsmen and women.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The Minister will recall that he and I have corresponded about the amount of support available to disabled athletes. In the light of the success of the United Kingdom team at the paralympics in Atlanta, can he confirm that disabled sportsmen and women will be eligible for awards of the kind he has just described from the lottery?

Mr. Sproat: Yes, I certainly can. This might be a suitable occasion on which to say that the young sportswoman about whom we corresponded, Miss Caroline Ellis, had great success. I congratulate the hon. and learned Gentleman on the assiduity with which he carried that matter through. I confirm that athletes with disabilities will be eligible for the revenue funding that we shall announce shortly.

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State announced today that individuals can get funding for dance and drama. Will the Minister note that Lord Gowrie said today that that is just an interim solution? Will youngsters such as Natasha Cornish in my constituency, who started on a course this September, be able to apply for funding next year and in subsequent years? What are the long-term prospects for funding for dance and drama students? Is the Secretary of State's announcement genuine or just a temporary measure?

Mr. Sproat: It is a genuine announcement. In case my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) does not catch your eye on this matter, Madam Speaker, may I thank him for all the help that he has given on this matter? Some £15 million will come from the lottery and some £10 million will come through the Department for Education and Employment, so it is not temporary in the sense that it is here today, gone tomorrow. If we can improve the scheme, obviously we shall. The hon. Gentleman's constituents should be absolutely clear that we want to ensure that many dance and drama students who have been unable to promote their abilities because of a lack of funds and because local authorities' discretionary ability to give them money has not been taken up will be enabled to do so through this scheme.

European Art and Culture Exhibition

13. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will stage an official national exhibition to promote the United Kingdom's participation in European art and culture. [37936]

Mr. Sproat: The United Kingdom has a flourishing cultural sector. Its artists, actors, musicians and performers demonstrate throughout the year that they can compete with the best in the world.

Mr. Dykes: I thank the Minister of State for that broad answer, but will he be a little more specific? In view of anxieties about the excessive domination of so-called American culture, should not the Government promote the virtues of the age of enlightenment, the renaissance, and 18th and 19th century romanticism rather than the present-day xenophobia of spokesmen who reside in Billericay and Southend?

Mr. Sproat: Xenophobia has no place in the Department of National Heritage. My hon. Friend asked for a specific example. Fair enough. I can tell him that 10 British applicants have won funds under the Kaleidoscope programme of the European Union to promote artistic and cultural activities with a European dimension. I congratulate them on that, which is exactly the sort of thing that my hon. Friend wants.

Mr. Bayley: Will the Minister join me in paying tribute to the work of the British Tourist Authority in encouraging people from overseas to come to Britain to enjoy our arts, culture and heritage? Given that every £1 grant in aid that the BTA receives brings in £27 of business to this country, of which £4 goes back to the Treasury in taxes, will the Minister give an undertaking to the House that there will be no further cuts in funding to the BTA in the current spending round?

Mr. Sproat: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his command of recondite figures, but I cannot give him the assurance that he seeks. He must wait until the Budget, like the rest of us. He is right to say that the role of the arts is important in tourism. I was near his constituency—in Harrogate—the other day to address the Museums Association. Some 62 per cent. of visitors to museums are foreign tourists and well over half of those who come to London theatres are foreign tourists, so the hon. Gentleman is right to say that the arts are extremely important.

National Lottery

14. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many good causes have been awarded funds from the national lottery in London. [37937]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Some 861 good causes in London have received lottery grants so far. My hon. Friend may be glad to know that eight projects in his constituency have received lottery funds totalling £654,000.

Mr. Hughes: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. We are grateful for the aid and look forward to the next eight projects and the eight after that. Does she agree that London is not only the capital of our country but the cultural capital of the world, so big investment in

projects in London is very much in our national interest? Does she also agree that the lottery and my right hon. Friend should carry on pumping money into London in our national interest rather than listen to the sneering attitude of too many Labour Members from outside London who do not understand London's place in our national life?

Mrs. Bottomley: I shall speak this evening to the Royal Society of Arts about our heritage and our future and set out Britain's exciting creative position with the present magnificent investment. A third of the population lives in the south-east, so it is understandable that London, as the capital city, should receive substantial sums of lottery money. However, I do not underestimate the significance of investment in Newcastle, Liverpool, Sunderland, Birmingham and Portsmouth. We are now seeing across the nation the remarkable regenerative effects of substantial lottery awards.

Mr. Eastham: Does the Secretary of State consider the Churchill family to be a good cause? I can assure her that my constituents were outraged by the £12 million award to that so-called good cause.

Mrs. Bottomley: There have been a great number of substantial awards; they are part of Britain's heritage. Alongside the large awards are numerous small awards. Some three quarters are for less than £100,000, and they are making a formidable difference. Only the Labour party would wish away our heritage and our inheritance and shred everything that we stand for. We understand that new Labour has no principles and no history.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judiciary

25. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he is taking to ensure that the judiciary are drawn from a wider range of social and educational backgrounds; and if he will make a statement. [37951]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Gary Streeter): The Lord Chancellor's policy is to appoint entirely on merit those best qualified for judicial office. Those among the legal profession who are eligible to apply for judicial office are encouraged to do so.

Mr. Mullin: Did the Minister notice that, of the most recent batch of appointments to the High Court, all had been to public school, five of the six had attended Oxford or Cambridge universities, and all were men? Are there any serious plans to break up the old boy network in the higher levels of the judiciary? If not, should we give the task of appointing members of the higher judiciary to someone other than the Lord Chancellor's Department?

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman had an opportunity recently to put his approach to the Home Affairs Committee, and it was soundly rejected. He did not persuade Committee members then and he has not persuaded me this afternoon. He appears to be launching a dramatic attack on the old school tie network—I wonder whether he has cleared it with the Leader of the Opposition.

Sir Anthony Grant: Will my hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that most people would prefer, and indeed expect, to be tried by their elders and betters rather than by some ghastly politically correct, cooked-up judiciary?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend is right of course. When appointing judges, it is important to get the right people for the job. Their skill, experience and expertise are fundamentally important issues.

Mr. Skinner: Why cannot judges be elected?

Mr. Streeter: Is it not typical of the Labour party that its members want to tear up 500 years of legal history? Judges are elected in America and I do not see any encouraging signs that we should follow them down that route.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my hon. Friend confirm that judges are drawn from the legal profession because knowledge of the law is important when sitting on the bench? The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) is really being critical of entrants to the legal profession. It is clear from looking at the Front Benches in this place that lawyers are doing quite well everywhere.

Mr. Streeter: We are delighted to hear that. It is a fact that the background of judges today reflects the entrants to the legal profession 20 or 30 years ago. Most judges are experienced, skilful and senior people. As the profile of entrants to the legal profession changes dramatically—as it has over the past 17 years—we can expect judges' backgrounds to change, and they will do so in the next few years.

Peerage Act 1963

26. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what responsibility he has for overseeing the provisions of the Peerage Act 1963. [37952]

Mr. Streeter: I have no such responsibilities. The Lord Chancellor has personal responsibility for supervising the working of the Act, which is exercised not through the Lord Chancellor's Department but through the office of the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery.

Mr. Mackinlay: Why will not the Government agree with the Opposition's modest proposition to modernise Parliament by ending the hereditary right to sit and vote in the House of Lords? Does not the Minister understand that it is absurd for a seat in Parliament to be decided, as in the case of the late Lord Moynihan, by whether and when a person made love to someone in the far east? Did the Minister notice that, on 28 and 29 August, Conservative peer Lord Noel-Buxton said that he went to the House of Lords for free meals, heating and lighting?

If we switched the lights off in the other place in December, half of the peers would not be facing the Lord Chancellor but St. Peter. It is time for reform.

Mr. Streeter: I am proud to be British and proud of our history, constitution and heritage, but here we have another Labour Member who wants to tear all that up. The issues raised by the hon. Gentleman have nothing to do with my Department. I can only speculate that the hon. Gentleman's sudden interest in life peerages flows from his anxiety about his prospects in Thurrock at the next election.

Dr. Spink: Does my hon. Friend agree that the other place works well and with great integrity? Does he also accept that, at times, the other place has given even his Department some difficulties in reviewing legislation? Does he agree that tinkering with the other place would damage it, as tinkering with the rest of our constitution would damage it?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. I believe in the maxim, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." The truth is that our constitution works well and is the envy of the world.

Legal Aid

27. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received from people in West Yorkshire over his proposals to change the procedure for the allocation of legal aid; and if he will make a statement. [37953]

Mr. Streeter: My Department has received many representations about the Lord Chancellor's plans to reform the legal aid scheme in England and Wales, two of which came from people in West Yorkshire. Neither was from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Minister accept that there is much concern in West Yorkshire about the way in which the current legal aid system, and the Government's plans for it, is causing harm to many people who rely on legal aid to pursue justice through courts? Will he ensure that people from lower income groups are able to obtain legal aid more easily?

Mr. Streeter: We wish to ensure that no one is denied access to justice simply because of the depth or shallowness of his pockets. Indeed, our reforms are designed to increase access to justice. The hon. Gentleman appears to be slightly out of the touch with the people of West Yorkshire. Only two of them have written to me about our legal aid reforms. One of them, a Mr. Nickolls from Bradford, wrote:

"Anyway, on legal aid at least, the correct things are now being said . . . so British justice might not be entirely dead yet—just taking a long time to come out of intensive care! Don't take years to get something done".

Sir Donald Thompson: Does my hon. Friend realise that in my part of West Yorkshire all the complaints are from people who are being pursued, often frivolously, by those who can get legal aid? Those with legal aid put down people who cannot, often wrongly.

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend is right. There is now a dramatic imbalance between those who are entitled to legal aid suing those who are not entitled. Our reforms are designed to get to the heart of the problem and to redress that imbalance, which has crept in over the past few years.

Departmental Administration

28. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to improve the administration of his Department. [37954]

Mr. Streeter: A wide range of measures is constantly being undertaken to improve administration. They currently include: taking forward the management improvements set out in the civil service White Paper "Continuity and Change"; use of the private finance initiative to deliver better computerisation, services and accommodation; and other measures to enhance the quality of service and provide better value for money for court users and the taxpayer.

Mr. Flynn: Would not administration be improved if the Minister's Department had more resources, obtained possibly by clawing back some of the millions of pounds that have been looted from legal aid by criminal millionaires? If we cannot claw the money back from the millionaires, possibly because they have fled abroad, should not we claw it back from those who have benefited from the work of those crooks? Can we make a start by demanding that the Conservative party pays back into the public purse some of the £400,000 given to it by Asil Nadir in an attempted bribe?

Mr. Streeter: We are all concerned about cases where there appears to have been an abuse of legal aid money. My Department has already moved to take steps to close the loophole that has been used by the apparently wealthy. Our legal aid reforms are designed to crack down on weak and trivial cases and to ensure that a stiffer merits test is applied, which is the very thing that the hon. Gentleman has urged us to do. I thank him for his support for our White Paper reforms.

Mr. Dykes: Will the improved administration plans for the Department include more training for judges, including senior judges, particularly after the most unfortunate decision made in the Maxwell case, which undermined the meticulous preparatory work of the Serious Fraud Office?

Mr. Streeter: When introducing the reforms brought forward by Lord Woolf, the judiciary will have to undergo serious training, which it is enthusiastic to do. Resources will be made available. It is our intention to have a legal system fit for the 21st century which is safe in Conservative hands.

Mr. Boateng: Talking of elders and betters, what is the Minister's response to the criticism of the Government by the judiciary over the weekend? The Master of the Rolls

described our civil justice system as a "no-win casino". The head of the chancery division described the Government's proposals for court fees as "mistaken". When will the Minister's Department publish Lord Woolf's report? Will he cost it so that we can reform a system that is increasingly falling into disrepute?

Mr. Streeter: We are about to announce our response to Lord Woolf's report. We shall take seriously any comments made by the judiciary. As I understand it, some comments were made in relation to the prospect of the Opposition Front Bench trying to outdo my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, who is introducing tremendous reforms that are supported by the nation at large. The hon. Gentleman's response appears to be, "Mine is bigger than yours."

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Is my hon. Friend satisfied that the administrative reforms that he is undertaking will enable his Department sufficiently to pursue contempt of court cases? In particular, will the reforms enable his Department to examine the clear contempt of court of those who quote privileged court documents, including the disgraceful conduct of the right hon. Members for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) in quoting privileged documents?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend raises a serious matter. The disclosure of documents in the case to which he refers clearly needs to be carefully scrutinised. I shall refer the matter to my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General for full consideration.

Land Registry, Plymouth

29. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects to visit the land registry and land charges offices in the Plymouth, Devonport constituency to discuss the work of the offices. [37955]

Mr. Streeter: I visited the Plymouth district land registry on Wednesday 18 September 1996, and I was greatly impressed by the enthusiasm and efficiency of all the officers whom I met.

Mr. Jamieson: I am pleased to note that my tough and exacting question, which I tabled before the summer recess, precipitated a long overdue visit by the Minister to the land registry in my constituency.

I note that the Minister said that he was impressed by the very good work that the staff are doing—so will he now give a guarantee that the morale of the staff and the excellent work that they are doing will not be undermined by the threat of privatisation?

Mr. Streeter: My visit was set up well before the hon. Gentleman tabled his question. We have no plans whatsoever to privatise the land registry. I know that that will come as a disappointment to the hon. Gentleman, who loves to scaremonger. Indeed, he is happy only if he has frightened people into not being able to sleep at night. On this occasion he has well missed the target.

Small Claims Courts

31. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to make the small claims court more efficient and accessible to people on low incomes. [37958]

Mr. Streeter: The National Audit Office's report on the small claims procedure, published in March, disclosed that most people who had pursued small claims had found the procedure cheap and easy to use. Considering the NAO's finding, the Committee of Public Accounts made a number of recommendations aimed at improving the efficiency and accessibility of the small claims procedure. The Department has responded to the Committee's conclusions in the minutes of the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Cohen: I welcome the Minister's answer, but as cuts in legal aid will damage the legal rights of those on low incomes, is it not incumbent on the Government to improve the efficiency of the small claims courts? Should not the Department be introducing measures immediately to increase financial limits, to improve the representation of those using the courts and to achieve a faster throughput of cases with swifter judgments?

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman is, uncharacteristically, out of touch. At the beginning of this year, we increased the limit for small claims from £1,000 to £3,000. We are monitoring that measure carefully. The hon. Gentleman is right: we want a small claims system that is cheap and easy to use. We believe that we have that, but we will monitor it carefully.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that some people, who succeed in gaining awards through the small claims courts, do not obtain them because procedures are not enforced? Can something be done urgently to improve that?

Mr. Streeter: As usual, my hon. Friend makes a good point. We are considering a range of ways in which to improve the enforceability of judgments so that people who obtain a judgment in the courts are guaranteed to receive the money. We will report in due course.

Madam Speaker's Statement

3.30 pm

Madam Speaker: I have a short announcement to make. While the House has been adjourned, very serious allegations have been widely made about the conduct of a number of Members. Indeed, the reputation of the House as a whole has been called into question. As Speaker, I am bound to be concerned about that. It is not for me to make any kind of judgment on the merits of the complaints made; but I would not be doing my duty as Speaker if I allowed this situation to pass without saying that I believe very strongly indeed that these matters must be resolved as soon as possible.

I hope that the Committee on Standards and Privileges will find it possible to make an early special report to the House, so that the full nature and scope of any investigations that it undertakes may be made known. If the Committee or the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards needs additional powers, no doubt the House will be invited to decide whether they should be granted. I can assure the House that all necessary steps will be taken to ensure that the Committee and the Commissioner are adequately staffed for whatever investigation they may undertake.

A number of other things need to be added. I will not allow allegations of misconduct to be made across the Floor of the House. Wherever the complaints are heard, the Members concerned are entitled to know precisely what it is they have to answer. The proceedings should be as transparent as possible so as to maintain public confidence and at the end, the issues ought to be resolved by a decision of the House.

Selective Cattle Slaughter

3.32 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East) (*by private notice*): To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the future of the selective cattle slaughter programme which was agreed at the Florence European Council.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I welcome the opportunity to give further information to the House this afternoon about the selective cattle slaughter programme, also known as the selective cull.

Right hon. and hon. Members will recall that, in an Adjournment debate just before the House rose in July, I presented draft legislation to implement the selective cull. During the debate I said that it was likely, although not certain, that Ministers would sign the relevant orders in the course of the next few weeks.

On 19 September, the Government issued a statement about the future of the selective cull of cattle in relation to bovine spongiform encephalopathy. My colleagues and I wrote to right hon. and hon. Members on 23 September to explain our position, which in substance is as follows.

First, the Government remain committed to making decisions on the basis of public and animal health and of objective scientific criteria. That was the approach agreed at Florence.

Secondly, since June, the Government have been working actively within the terms of the Florence agreements so as to take all the steps envisaged by the framework—with, of course, the exception of the selective cull.

Since the Adjournment debate on 24 July, the scientific assessments that formed the basis of the culling programme have been further developed. We have received valuable assistance from Professor Roy Anderson and his team. They published an analysis in *Nature* on 29 August, which shows that the epidemic will virtually die out around 2001, irrespective of any further measures. It is clear that there is no credible cull policy that will substantially accelerate the rate of decline or bring forward the date when BSE will be eliminated.

Moreover, interim findings reported in July showed that the calves of dams infected with BSE were more likely to develop BSE than the calves of unaffected dams. That was interpreted as evidence for "maternal transmission". Further work that has become available since July has shown that the findings are not necessarily caused by the passage of infection from mother to calf: there are other and equally plausible explanations. Further analysis of the study is being undertaken by Government and Oxford university scientists and will be considered shortly by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee.

For those reasons, the Government are not, at least for the time being, proceeding with a selective cull. However, we shall consider the position further in the light of the developing science and other relevant matters. The Commission decision that implements the Florence agreement specifically recognises that the UK's plan for the eradication of BSE may need to be adapted in the light of scientific and epidemiological developments.

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

Moreover, there is another development. It has become increasingly clear during the summer that the prospect of other member states agreeing to an early and substantial lifting of the export ban for the United Kingdom has lessened. That fact is likely to diminish the support that right hon. and hon. Members would wish to extend to a substantial accelerated cull policy.

There will be further consultations with the European Commission on proposals for relaxing export restrictions for animals and products from herds that can be certified to have had no history of BSE. The idea of certified herds is referred to in the Florence framework. The beef assurance scheme for specialist beef farmers with late-maturing animals is one example of that approach. We are in discussion with the Commission about other possible options. Clearly, if there were a prospect of early progress on exports from certified herds, we would need to take account of that when considering the options for a selective cull. Equally, if there were clear evidence of maternal transmission, which for the moment there is not, we would need to take account of such evidence too, when looking at other cull options.

In conclusion, I recognise the importance of the issue for the farming industry and the interest that it arouses in the House. I shall continue to report to the House as circumstances warrant.

Dr. Strang: Accepting that it will be some time before we know whether there is an increase in the number of cases of the new variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, and accepting that it will be some time before we know whether there is any link at all, any cause whatever, between the eating of contaminated beef and beef products and the new variant of CJD, I put it to the Minister that he has a responsibility to do all that he reasonably can to minimise the suffering in the farming and the beef industries that has resulted from the BSE crisis.

I remind the Minister of what the Prime Minister said on 24 June, reporting on the Florence European Council, when he informed the House that he expected to be in a position to take a major step towards lifting the ban on the export of our beef and beef products in October, and that he hoped that in November we would be in a position whereby we could export all the meat overseas that we are unable to sell in this country. I also remind the Minister that, on the last day that the House sat before the summer recess—on 24 July—he himself described the Florence agreement as a great success and said that it was solidly pointing the way forward.

I put it to the Minister that, of course, the results of the experiment on maternal transmission and the results of the statistical analysis carried out by Professor Roy Anderson and his colleagues at Oxford on the issue mean that we can redirect the selective slaughter programme to make it more effective in terms of reducing the number of BSE cases for a given number of cows slaughtered.

Neither of those pieces of evidence can be used to justify not implementing our side of the Florence agreement. Surely the Minister is aware that the only way to regain the jobs and rebuild the beef industry is to secure a lifting of the ban, and that the only mechanism on the table for achieving that is the Florence agreement. Is he walking away from that agreement as a concession to the increasingly strident anti-European faction in the Conservative party? Does the decision to suspend the selective slaughter programme have something to do with the confusion and chaos that has resulted from the Government's complete inability effectively to implement their own over-30-month slaughter scheme?

On the day the House rose, the Minister said that he hoped to clear the backlog in that scheme by about the middle of October. We are now told that it will be December. Does he intend to wait to at least the end of December before embarking on the selective slaughter programme? He has not justified his decision to suspend that programme and is adding to the uncertainty in the industry.

Finally, may I draw to the Minister's attention the fact that the National Farmers Union of England and Wales last week passed a motion of no confidence in him? The union explicitly said that he had lost touch with the industry and was unable effectively to represent the interests of the industry or those of the country in the European Union. Is he aware that the National Farmers Union was speaking for beef farmers the length and breadth of this country, for the beef industry and for the country as a whole? Is it not clear as each month passes that, yes, we need a new Minister, but we also need a new Government if we are to tackle the BSE crisis effectively and decisively?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman effectively made four points. He began by saying that it was important to address the financial difficulties in farming, and I agree. He will recall that in July, in negotiation with the European Union, we brought forward a package of £109 million to help beef producers. In September, I announced a further package of £60 million on hill livestock compensatory allowances, and the hon. Gentleman will recall that we have increased the advance payment of premia from 60 to 80 per cent. payable in November, which increases the sum payable for beef to about £25. If the hon. Gentleman had been at the Bournemouth conference, he would have heard me announce a further package of beef support of £29 million. He will also bear it in mind that we are in discussions with the European Union about a further beef package.

I think that the hon. Gentleman was pressing me to present a selective cull policy. I have two observations. First, it would not be appropriate to announce a large-scale selective cull policy unless it was fairly clear that there would be a rapid and substantial lifting of the ban. It is fairly clear that there will not be such a lifting of the ban, because the other member states do not want that. As to the other justification for a selective cull, if there was a free-standing scientific reason for it, I might announce one. There might be in relation to maternal transmission, for example, if the evidence proves that there is such transmission, but at the moment it does not.

We are not walking away from the Florence agreement. The hon. Gentleman asked about the over-30-month scheme. He would have enjoyed my Bournemouth speech, because he would have heard me announce a further £16.6 million to clear the backlog. He will be extremely pleased to know that last week we slaughtered about

40,000 beasts under the over-30-month scheme. That is a large step towards achieving the 55,000 a week that we hope to reach fairly shortly.

Mr. John Biffen (North Shropshire): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many hon. Members fully appreciate the intractable nature of the problems? To enable the House the better to make an assessment, can he say what has been the reaction of our European Union partners, either explicitly or informally, to the findings of Professor Anderson and his Oxford team?

Mr. Hogg: They are still considering the significance of the findings. There is no substantial challenge to the central proposition that the disease will have been largely eradicated from the national herd by around the turn of the century. There will be some debate as to the extent of the tail past 2001, but the plain fact is that the disease is dying away from its high point of 36,500 confirmed cases in 1992. The figure last year was about 15,000, while this year we shall see about 8,000 cases. The numbers are falling by 40 per cent. year on year, so we are fairly confident about the 2001 date. However, there will be some dispute about the size of the tail.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I shall be interested to hear how the Minister justifies his statement that he is not walking away from the Florence agreement. How does he square his announcement this afternoon with that statement? Does he agree that the selective cull cannot start until the over-30-month cull has been completed? Will he give an assurance that he will take emergency powers to clear the OTM backlog unless it has been cleared by Christmas? How does this afternoon's announcement square with the possibility of getting a partial lifting of the export ban on the basis of regional and accredited herds?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman will recall that the Florence agreement explicitly stated that proposals should be considered in the light of the most up-to-date scientific and objective criteria, and we are invoking that. He will have heard me tell the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) that last week we succeeded in slaughtering just short of 40,000 cattle under the 30-month scheme. I intend to increase the weekly slaughter to about 55,000, and I very much hope that we shall clear the backlog by the end of the year.

We are working on the concept of certified herds, which will be a scheme involving herds that one could plausibly describe as having had no association with BSE—the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) will forgive me for using shorthand here—of which the beef assurance scheme is one sub-set, and we are in contact with the Commission about that. The schemes are general in their application in the United Kingdom, although it may well be that some parts of the United Kingdom—especially with regard to the certified herds scheme—will find it easier to satisfy the criteria sooner than others.

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): In his helpful letter to colleagues on 23 September, my right hon. and learned Friend referred to his recognition of the fact that the specialist beef industry had been hard hit in the past six months. He went on to state that a £60 million cash injection was to be made available under the less-favoured areas scheme. Will he bear it in mind that the disease hits indiscriminately the less-favoured and better-favoured areas? The vale of York has been particularly hard hit, and needs the kind of support that is being provided to the less-favoured areas. In saying that, I represent the views not only of my constituents, but of my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who cannot be with us this afternoon.

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend is entirely right. He will forgive me if I remind the House about the package of £109 million that I announced in July which is general in its application. He touched on the £60 million for HLCAs, and he will forgive me if I refer again to the £29 million that I announced at Bournemouth, which again is general in its application. As I also mentioned at Bournemouth, there are discussions within the EU about the nature and shape of a future beef support package. We shall make a judgment on whether there are further national steps that we can take when we have seen the outcome of those discussions.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South–West): The Minister has had more than three months to negotiate a timetable for the lifting of the ban, but he is no further forward. Is it not time that someone else had a try?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is not right to say that I am no further forward. There is a recognition that there may be scope for movement in respect of certified herds in the beef assurance scheme, but the plain truth is that there is an unwillingness on the part of a number of member states—for example, Germany—to lift the ban rapidly and substantially. The reason for that is the concern that EU Agriculture Ministers feel about demand in their countries, and their political anxieties about the reaction of their farming constituents to lifting the ban. That is clearly an obstacle to a rapid and substantial lifting of the ban. It should not be, but it is and the House needs to face that fact.

Sir Jim Spicer (West Dorset): My right hon. and learned Friend is right, but is it not true that the Commission is being fair and impartial in examining the scientific evidence, whereas all the other member states—particularly Germany—are determined that they will not lift the ban until BSE is eradicated in this country, whatever we do? If that ban is to remain in place until 2001 plus—probably 2002, 2003 or 2004—why on earth are people suggesting that we should go down the road of a massive additional slaughter, with nothing to show for it?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend puts the argument clearly. As to our relations with the Commission, we have worked closely with it, and our working relations with the Commissioner and his officials are good. It is true that a number of member states have proved pretty obdurate. I am not as pessimistic as my hon. Friend about the date when the ban will be lifted. I have already mentioned certified herds, so I shall not repeat that. If confidence in beef were restored in EU member states, those states might be willing to make more rapid progress than seems likely at the moment.

Sir James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Does the Minister accept that the case for the exclusion of Northern

[Sir James Molyneaux]

Ireland from the ban rests not on territorial or political considerations, but on the uniquely high standard of animal health and the traceability even of individual animals? Will he bear that very much in mind when he is considering those further options?

Mr. Hogg: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. There have been under 2,000 confirmed cases of BSE in the Province—I am using figures off the cuff, so I might be marginally wrong, but I think that there have been about 1,700. I think that there have been 46 cases this year—again, that figure is off the cuff—which is very low. Northern Ireland has a much better traceability scheme than the rest of the United Kingdom. That is a reflection of its computer-based movement-recording system. The concept of certified herds was worked out with Northern Ireland very much in mind. It is not specific to Northern Ireland in the sense that it excludes any other part of the United Kingdom, but I fancy that Northern Ireland will find it easier to satisfy the criteria.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I appreciate the excellent work that my right hon. and learned Friend and his colleagues in the four countries are doing. Does he appreciate that the day-to-day complaints that one gets on farms concern the 30-month scheme? Despite the excellent figures that he has given, which show an improvement in the past week or two, will he try to speed things up even more? With winter approaching, cattle now have to come in and that is costing farmers a great deal of additional money while the value is dropping.

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend is right. I am conscious that the farming industry and right hon. and hon. Members are particularly concerned about the backlog. That is why I announced the £16.6 million last Tuesday, which we shall use to take up cold storage facilities of various kinds. Last week, we were a few score short of 40,000 killed, which is a huge improvement on what we have been averaging. I hope that we shall get the weekly cull rate up to 55,000. If we can, and if we can sustain it, I hope that we shall clear the backlog by around Christmas or the end of the year.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The Minister has repeatedly stated that our European partners are stopping us selling our meat in Europe and arguing that the ban should not be lifted. If that is the case, why does he not stand before a committee of European Members of Parliament? They have asked him to give evidence to such a committee, so that he can reassure them. Is the real reason why he will not meet them and give evidence the fact that he has something to hide? Is not the truth that in so far as the whole market for beef throughout the Community has been destroyed, the Minister should be prepared to give evidence directly?

Mr. Hogg: That is an interesting question, because it tells us something about the Labour party's attitude to the relationship of Ministers to the House and to the European Union. Let me state clearly to whom I am accountable: I am accountable to this House and to the British electorate and this is the only place to which I am accountable. In furtherance of that accountability, I have given evidence to a joint meeting of the Health and Agriculture Select Committees and I have appeared in this place many times to answer questions, today being an example. However, I was not aware that I was accountable to the European Parliament.

Sir John Cope (Northavon): My right hon. and learned Friend's statement is welcome in the circumstances, for the reasons given by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir J. Spicer), but the acceleration of the existing cull is the immediate problem. On acceleration, will he give special attention to the south-west where, as far as I can see from the figures, we are further behind than are most parts of the country? The problem is made more difficult by the reduction in the price offered for animals sent for slaughter in that way.

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend will recall that I had a very spirited meeting in the south-west some two weeks ago. What we need to do—and we shall be in a better position to do it with the registration scheme—is to identify the areas of greatest pressure. When we have identified them—and I am quite sure that the south-west will be one—it will be possible to give greater emphasis to those areas in the course of making rendering and slaughtering facilities available.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): While some areas may suffer more pressure than others, does the Minister accept that the smaller beef farmers in many places face real and urgent crises? I spent several hours on Saturday with a small beef farmer in my constituency. He cannot wait until Christmas if he is to survive. European Ministers may be looking after their farmers, but can we have some guarantee that small beef farmers in Britain will survive the next few months?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is right to focus on the small specialist beef producer who does not have any other products and does not run a mixed farm. That is the point behind his observation, and it is perfectly true. We took account of that to some degree when we targeted the last £29 million, which was part of the July tranche. He will also remember the July package and the various other measures that we have outlined. We have a further £29 million to spend, which I announced on Tuesday last. We shall certainly discuss with the industry how best to give assistance to beef producers. I am conscious of his point, and I shall take account of it in the course of the negotiations within the European Council.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Will my right hon. and learned Friend bear it in mind that small farmers simply cannot bear the cost of feeding their cattle off the fields? As the acceleration of the scheme is what matters most, he should consider the incineration of carcases in the open, because the bottleneck with the renderers is insupportable. There would be much public sympathy and understanding for that position, in view of our experience with foot-and-mouth disease.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise the importance of clearing the backlog. That is wholly correct. I hope that he will accept that we are doing our utmost to get that done. On open field incineration, I am

bound to say that I am extraordinarily unenthusiastic about it. There is a range of legal and environmental problems—I suspect that we would be taken to court if we tried it—but my real objection is different. I ask myself what the effect would be on consumer confidence in beef if we were to burn hundreds of thousands of carcases in the fields, which presumably would be shown on television. I very much doubt that that is in the interests of the farming industry.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): May I remind the Minister that there are only two abattoirs in Wales that are certified for the purposes of the cull and which serve the whole country? At present, only a trickle of animals is going through. One of the abattoirs is now importing animals from Scotland for slaughter, thereby leaving Welsh farmers with nowhere to take their animals. May I ask the Minister's Department to intervene as soon as possible in that argument, to ensure that Welsh farmers have fair play?

Mr. Hogg: I do not want to deal with the specific points raised by that particular problem, but the hon. Gentleman has correctly highlighted some of the problems that have arisen in Wales. We have been able to address those matters, but the registration will give us a clearer view and will enable us to decide whether further action is justified.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): I should like to give a particularly warm welcome to my right hon. and learned Friend's decision not to kill perfectly healthy young cattle unnecessarily. Is he aware that abattoir capacity for the over-30-month scheme is not being allocated fairly over the whole country? Is he aware that Newark cattle market, for example, is particularly affected? If the OTM scheme is to be accepted, it must be dealt with fairly across the country and people must feel that all is being done for them as fairly as possible.

Mr. Hogg: We try to allocate fairly. Our overriding objective is to clear the backlog. There is a certain amount of rough justice because we are trying to maximise throughput. That is why we have been able to kill 40,000 cattle a week, as we achieved to all intents and purposes last week. The substantially increased throughput will go a long way to meeting the anxiety of my hon. Friend's constituents. I hope that we shall clear the backlog by the end of the year. We shall certainly strive strenuously to achieve that.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I find it difficult to reconcile the Minister's remarks with the reality in my constituency. It is clear that the existing cull will not be cleared by the end of the year. It may not be cleared by March. There are already problems with incineration and with renderers, and impossible situations have arisen with far more carcases than anyone can deal with at the moment. The farming community has a legitimate complaint against the Minister for incompetence. Worse than that, the vets in my area are not now able to deal with sick or injured animals. Unless the Minister takes urgent action, the chaos will continue. The sooner he hands over to someone who knows what he is doing, the better.

Mr. Hogg: I am not as pessimistic as the hon. Lady on any of the points that she made. She has overlooked my announcement last week of £16.6 million, to enable us to increase the slaughter throughput substantially. I am glad to say, as I have mentioned several times already, that we have increased the throughput to 40,000 a week. The hon. Lady's conclusions are therefore mistaken.

Casualties are an issue of concern. If the hon. Lady would care to discuss it further with my Department—

Mrs. Dunwoody: Again.

Mr. Hogg: Again. The hon. Lady is never backward. My colleagues will be happy to discuss the issue further, because we want to address the specific problems that have been identified by right hon. and hon. Members.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): While I appreciate the steps already taken by the Government and the huge sums already earmarked to deal with the horrendous situation, is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of the dire situation here and now in the south-west, particularly the far end of Cornwall? Will he listen to the representations that I have made and those made by my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) to increase the abattoir capacity in that part of Cornwall? If he does not do that, he will have to reconsider having to resort to open-air burning of carcases, even though one appreciates that that would cause difficulties and bad publicity.

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. and hon. Friends have taken account of what my hon. Friend has said about the backlog in the south-west. Points made by him and other colleagues caused us to conclude that a further injection of public money—£16.6 million—was justified to clear the backlog. I am grateful for the advice that he has given us on that. I remain cautious about incineration in the fields. I do not want to advocate such a policy, because it would be damaging for the reputation of beef in Britain.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Is the Minister aware that one reason why his colleague the Secretary of State for Wales is not with him on the Front Bench may be that on two occasions today he has been barricaded in at his appointment by angry west Wales farmers and has had to be rescued by the Dyfed-Powys police helicopter? Perhaps the Secretary of State for Wales now appreciates the anger—particularly in Wales, but presumably throughout the farming community—at the Government's inaction, particularly over the cull programme. Can he give us an assurance today on the current regulation operated by the Intervention Board that prevents former abattoirs—slaughterhouses—with European Union approval from being used for the current cull programme? I have a letter from his colleague the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans), stating that those abattoirs cannot be brought back into the scheme because they are not currently operating. That is utter nonsense, but unfortunately it illustrates only too well the Government's incompetence in handling the programme.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is just mouthing words and has clearly not been paying attention to what I have been saying in my reply to the private notice question. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is extremely aware of the difficulties in Wales and has been

[Mr. Hogg]

active in meeting the requirements and demands of the farming community there. It was partly because of those demands, along with representations made by my hon. Friends and others, that I announced a substantial package last week, which included the £16.6 million to clear the backlog and the additional £29 million to meet the beef producers' requirements.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: We shall now move on to the business statement.

Business of the House

4.6 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Madam Speaker, I should like to make a short business statement. The business for this week will be as follows:

MONDAY 14 OCTOBER AND TUESDAY 15 OCTOBER—Debate on a Government motion to approve the Defence Estimates 1996 (Cm 3223).

At the end on Tuesday—motion on the Asylum (Designated Countries of Destination and Designated Safe Third Countries) Order.

Motion to suspend further proceedings on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill until the next Session of Parliament.

WEDNESDAY 16 OCTOBER—Until 2.30 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Debate on a motion to take note of the outstanding reports of the Public Accounts Committee to which the Government have replied. Details will be given in the *Official Report.*

The House will also wish to now that on Tuesday 15 October, there will be a debate on the Merger Regulation in European Standing Committee B.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report.*

The House will meet for prorogation at 9.30 am on Thursday 17 October and the new Session will be opened on Wednesday 23 October.

[Tuesday 15 October: European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community Document: No. 9961/96, The Merger Regulation. Relevant European Legislation Committee Report: HC 51-xxvi (1995-96).

Wednesday 16 October: Debate on a motion to take note of the outstanding reports of the Public Accounts Committee to which the Government have replied. The relevant reports are as follows:

Number	*Report Title*	*HC Number*	*Date of publication*
Reports Session 1994–95			
41	*MOD: Management of the Capital Works Programme*	*454*	*22 November*
42	*NHS: Outpatient Services in England and Wales*	*448*	*23 November*
43	*Medical Research Council: Sale of the Mount Vernon Site, Hampstead*	*502*	*29 November*
44	*MOD: Major Projects Report 1994*	*487*	*30 November*
45	*Sale of County Hall (Riverside Building) to Shirayama Shokusan Company Ltd*	*408*	*6 December*
46	*MOD: The Risks of Fraud in Defence Procurement*	*365*	*7 December*
47	*London Docklands Development Corporation: The Limehouse Link*	*574*	*13 December*

Number	Report Title	HC Number	Date of publication
Reports Session 1995–96			
1	Department of Social Security: Appropriation Accounts 1993–94: Child Support Agency	31	20 December
2	Health Care International (Scotland) Ltd	32	21 December
3	Health and Personal Social Services in Northern Ireland (Transport Services)	55	17 January
4	Community Economic Regeneration Scheme and Community Regeneration and Improvement Special Programme	56	18 January
5	Financial Controls in Training and Enterprise Councils	108	24 January
6	A Review of the Controls Over Indirectly Funded Operations of the Metropolitan Police Service	109	25 January
7	The Meteorological Office Executive Agency: Evaluation of Performance	216	28 February
8	Department of Social Security and Benefits Agency: Purchase of Postal and Courier Services	232	29 February
9	Protecting and Presenting Scotland's Heritage properties	233	6 March
10	The Annual Report of the European Court of Auditors and the Statement of Assurance	250	13 March
11	Selective Financial Assistance for Tourism in Northern Ireland	266	14 March
12	Selective Financial Assistance for Tourism in Northern Ireland	267	20 March
13	The Operations of the Student Loans Company Ltd	110	21 March
14	Excess Votes 1994–95	285	27 March
15	Financial Viability of the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme (England and Wales)	158	15 May
16	Metropolitan Police Service: Responding to Calls from the Public	33	16 May
17	The Prison Service (England and Wales): Qualification of Audit Opinion and Report on Excess Vote Expenditure	234	22 May
18	BBC World Service	206	5 June
19	Department of Social Security: Appropriation Accounts 1994–95: Class XIII Vote 1	224	6 June
20	Overseas Development Administration: Health and Population	277	12 June
21	Ministry of Defence: Management of Fire Risks Intervention Board for Agricultural	257	13 June
22	Produce: Preventing, Detecting and Acting on Irregularities	238	26 June
23	National Heritage Memorial Fund Account 1994–95, Replacement of an Accounting Officer	199	27 June
24	Inland Revenue Department: Account Matters	217	3 July
25	Civil Legal Aid Means Testing	314	4 July
26	Education and Library Boards (Northern Ireland) Maintenance of Board Property	269	10 July
27	Department of the Environment: Castlecourt Shopping Centre Belfast—Arrangements for Clawback of urban Development Grant	268	10 July
28	Home Office: Sale of Dtels	151	11 July
29	H M Treasury: Sale of the Government Debt in British Telecommunications and the Privatised Electricity Companies	286	17 July
30	Ministry of Defence: Management of Works of Art	337	18 July
31	Clinical Audit in England	304	24 July
32	Sale of London Buses	251	25 July
33	HM Customs and Excise: Checking Claims for Repayment of VAT	181	8 August
34	The Management of Sickness Absence in Her Majesty's the Land Registry	307	2 August

Number	*Report Title*	*HC Number*	*Date of publication*
35	*HM Customs and Excise: Account Matters*	*29*	*19 August*
36	*Vehicle Excise Duty: Evasion and Enforcement*	*375*	*1 August*
37	*Home Office Support for Voluntary Organisations*	*376*	*7 August*
38	*Lord Chancellor's Department and the Court Service: Handling Small Claims in the County Courts*	*410*	*26 July*
39	*NAO Estimates 1996–97*	*176*	*14 August*
40	*NIAO Estimates 1996–97*	*177*	*14 August*
41	*Evaluating the Applications to run the National Lottery and the Director General's Travel and Hospitality Arrangements*	*96*	*31 July]*

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): In view of that statement, will the Leader of the House say whether there is to be a statement from someone at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office about the brutal murder in Cyprus at the weekend of an unarmed Greek Cypriot, which followed two equally brutal murders—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been a Member of the House long enough to know that the business statement is narrow and deals with only two matters. The Leader of the House is responsible only for the short statement that he has made and the debate cannot be widened. We shall now move on to the defence estimates.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you had notice from the Government of a statement on the death last Thursday of two Neath council workers who were poisoned in a local sewer? More than 100 people were so badly affected that they had to be admitted to hospital. Surely, there should be a public inquiry into the incident—it is a serious matter when lethal substances are illegally dumped in a sewer. If it can happen in Neath, it could happen throughout Wales or, indeed, Britain. Something must be done about it.

Madam Speaker: I have not been informed that any Minister is seeking to make a statement on that matter.

DEFENCE ESTIMATES

[First Day]

[Relevant document: The Seventh Report from the Defence Committee of Session 1995-96, entitled 'Statement on the Defence Estimates 1996', House of Commons Paper No. 215.]

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.9 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Portillo): I beg to move,

That this House approves the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1996 contained in Cm. 3223.

I welcome the opportunity for the House to debate the "Statement on the Defence Estimates", and the Select Committee's report. I also want to report to the House on developments since the House last met.

It is common ground that Britain's armed forces are highly disciplined, professional and effective—a credit to themselves and to the nation. That high regard has been sustained by their work in Northern Ireland. Few other armed services could have dealt with such a delicate situation so well. They provide security and reassurance to the Province, without being heavy-handed. The private soldier and the non-commissioned officer handle provocation with exemplary self-control.

Throughout the ceasefire our forces remained alert, aware that it could end at any time. Now that it has ended they face again the bomb, the mortar and the sniper's fire.

The House will condemn the bomb attack on HQ Northern Ireland. It was savage and it was intended to plunge the Province into a mayhem of terrorist action and counter-action. It cost Warrant Officer Bradwell his life, and the House will be thinking of his family, and all those who were injured, to whom we extend our sympathy and our respects.

I do not wish to rush to comment on how security was breached. The Royal Ulster Constabulary is conducting a criminal investigation and the Army is mounting a security investigation in parallel. The Army has applied new measures that it thinks necessary, and I want it exhaustively to analyse the evidence from Monday's bomb, to draw final conclusions about what happened and what can be learnt.

Through so many years of violence, the terrorist has not shaken our resolve—not the resolve of the people of Northern Ireland, nor of those on the mainland, nor of those in the armed forces. The political process demonstrates that reconciliation can be achieved between those committed to democratic means. Change can be effected, but only if it is the will of the people of Northern Ireland. The armed forces remain there, supporting the police, so that, in Northern Ireland as in every other part of the United Kingdom, the people can determine how they are governed.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I ask the Secretary of State a question of which I gave his office notice on Thursday 10 October? Has his Department—he is not responsible because it happened many Secretaries of State for Defence ago—considered the case of Colin

Wallace? My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) and I were rubbished from the Dispatch Box in several Adjournment debates for saying that which the Court of Appeal now upholds. Should not the Ministry of Defence consider the lessons to be learnt from what has happened to Colin Wallace?

Mr. Portillo: I will be happy to think about that issue. I do not wish to rubbish anything that the hon. Gentleman says today or on any other occasion, but nor do I want to give off-the-cuff answers about a complex subject. If the hon. Gentleman wants to raise with me—perhaps by letter—issues that he believes arise, I will be happy to consider them.

In the first days of this month, another matter touching the well-being of our forces has also been in our minds. My hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces announced that we now know that organophosphate insecticides were more widely used in the Gulf than we had thought. Some were bought locally and used to control insects that might have posed a risk to health. I regret that the House has been given misleading information in answers that Ministers have given in good faith on the basis of advice.

As our first concern is the health of our veterans, the records of those who have attended the medical assessment programme are being re-examined, to see whether using insecticides provides a clue to their condition. More broadly, the Medical Research Council will take it into account in making its recommendations on the research programme on Gulf war health.

We shall also examine minutely who used the sprays, what safety procedures applied to the spraying and whether they were complied with. Until those steps have been taken, I believe that we should all be cautious about making links between that important new information and a broad range of health complaints which may or may not be linked and may or may not constitute a syndrome. The Minister of State and I are determined to get to the bottom of this matter.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Will the study also give consideration to whether organophosphates and the anti-malarial treatment given to our armed forces may have had some link to this syndrome?

Mr. Portillo: Yes. Let me distinguish between two things: there are people who are sick; there are medical conditions. We have a new piece of information, and we need to see whether there is a link between it and people's medical conditions. We also have a much broader study to undertake; the Medical Research Council is giving us advice as to what form it should take. It certainly needs to be broad, and it needs to investigate the incidence of illness among veterans and compare it with the incidence of illness in the population in general. It must also take into account all possible factors and the links between them.

As the Gulf conflict demonstrated, our armed forces remain equipped to play their part in enhancing security and defending our interests world wide. An important change for Britain will occur in 1997, when sovereignty over Hong Kong is transferred to China and the British garrison withdraws. Asia Pacific is important to us. The United Kingdom is the largest European investor in the region, and the second largest exporter of goods. It is also the biggest exporter of invisibles.

The region has its fair share of potential trouble spots. In recent months there have been tensions between North and South Korea and China and Taiwan, and between nations that dispute the sovereignty of islands. Britain can play a part in urging restraint and in urging a peaceful resolution of disputes, and by maintaining a reassuring presence.

In Asia Pacific as elsewhere the reputation and standing of our armed forces is high. We will continue to participate in combined training and will send our largest ever contribution to next year's Exercise Flying Fish, organised by the five-power defence arrangements. We shall improve our links with Japan and with United States forces in the Pacific. We will maintain the Gurkha battalion in Brunei.

To our many friends in the region, our message is clear: we may be leaving Hong Kong but we are staying in Asia Pacific.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford–on–Avon): On Britain's interests in Asia Pacific and the peaceful resolution of disputes, has the right hon. Gentleman noted the award of the Nobel peace prize to Bishop Belo and Jose Ramos Horta? Is he aware of Jose Ramos Horta's testimony in the Grand Committee Room of this House and in Liverpool Crown court that British Hawk aircraft, sold by Britain to the Indonesian regime, are being used in the repression of the people of East Timor—a repression of peculiar, indeed genocidal cruelty? Does he understand that if ever the Government could get away with affecting ignorance of the atrocities being perpetrated using these and other British military exports, they can certainly no longer do so? If the right hon. Gentleman will not condemn these practices by the Indonesian Government and forthwith announce a ban on any further sales of arms or military assistance to them, he and the Government must stand condemned in the dock of international opinion—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. That is a very long intervention. The hon. Gentleman has been here long enough to know that interventions are meant to be short.

Mr. Portillo: We are having a two-day debate, and I would have thought that if the hon. Gentleman had a speech to make he could have saved that intervention until then.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Does my right hon. Friend agree with the Opposition defence spokesman, who has made it clear that these aircraft lack the range to attack targets in East Timor? Perhaps that spokesman would like to have a word with his Back Bencher.

Mr. Portillo: I have no evidence that Hawk aircraft have been used against the population of Indonesia, but there will be many—not least in my hon. Friend's constituency—who will be interested to hear that members of the Labour party are leading a campaign that would have serious consequences for the people of this country, based on what I regard as very flimsy evidence. This Government have a great concern for human rights and will always consider any evidence that is produced.

[Mr. Portillo]

Some events over the summer reminded us of challenges to international order and British interests. Conflict between states and peoples continues to be a threat. Ethnic and territorial disputes are always with us. We cannot abolish greed, intolerance and extremism. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles can only further heighten instability. Saddam Hussein remains a serious threat to stability, and he is for ever probing our resolve, testing us to see how far we will let him go.

An important legacy from the Gulf war is the United Nations Special Commission, which has done excellent work to require Saddam's compliance with UN resolutions on the elimination of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. Throughout the commission's years of operation Saddam has lied and cheated, using every ploy to maintain his deadly programme. In 1991, the United Nations adopted Security Council resolution 688 against Saddam's repression of the civilian population. No-fly zones were established over northern and southern Iraq. We have 400 personnel, tornadoes and VC-10 tankers helping to enforce the no-fly zones.

The Iraqi military build-up this summer and the subsequent attack on Irbil could not go unchallenged. The Iraqi mobilisation was large scale: 45,000 troops and more than 300 tanks. We fully supported the United States' action against Iraqi missile sites and agreed that United States aircraft could use the facilities at Diego Garcia. Following the American action, Iraqi troops were not heavily involved in the further KDP advance on Sulaymaniyah. The extension of the southern no-fly zone to the 33rd parallel enables more effective monitoring of compliance with UN Security Council resolutions, and prevents Saddam from using air bases and aircraft over most of Iraq south of Baghdad. That sharply reduces his ability to use force against his own people or his neighbours.

As the House knows, much larger numbers of British forces have been involved in Bosnia.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Portillo: On Iraq, yes.

Mrs. Clwyd: Does the Minister agree that the policy, such as it was, was a complete shambles because it consolidated Saddam's foothold in northern Iraq and did not dislodge him in any way? What is the Minister's concept of a safe haven, because the people of northern Iraq no longer understand that concept?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Lady seeks to broaden the commendable initiative of safe havens, which was undertaken by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, to include a concept that we have not been in a position to guarantee: the safety of all Kurds in northern Iraq. We have not been in a position to bring about that broader concept. She asked me what we have achieved. First, we achieved the realisation in Saddam's mind that if he mobilises vast numbers of troops there will be a reaction—certainly from the United States and Britain, and from allies and partners too. Secondly, as I said in my speech, Iraqi troops were not then involved in the further advance of the KDP towards Sulaymaniyah. Thirdly, Saddam has lost something important: the ability to operate his aircraft over almost half his country. That is not only a humiliation to him but a considerable military impediment, should he try to mobilise for an attack either on his own people or on a neighbouring state.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): My right hon. Friend spoke about the new dangers that we face in Iraq and our continuing commitments to Bosnia and other parts of the world. Does he agree that it is only right that we ensure that our armed forces have the best equipment possible? News over the weekend has therefore been worrying. The chairman of the German defence committee says that the Germans will drag their feet over the Eurofighter 2000. My right hon. Friend knows my constituency's involvement in the production of the Eurofighter 2000. Will he use his influence with the Germans to ensure that they do not drag their feet over their commitment to the Eurofighter and restate his commitment to that valuable project?

Mr. Portillo: I do so happily. My hon. Friend is an assiduous champion of the project. We are determined to press on with it and we would like to see the Germans and our other partners participating in order to get it under way quickly. I shall make some considered comments on the subject later in my speech.

As the House knows, much larger numbers of British forces have been involved in Bosnia, first as part of UNPROFOR and now with the peace implementation force, IFOR. IFOR's success in separating and disarming the factions has enabled us to reduce British numbers to around 9,000 troops on the ground and 500 elsewhere. That includes some 1,200 reservists, who are making a crucial contribution. We remain the second largest IFOR contributor.

IFOR troops helped to ensure that the Bosnian elections in September took place peacefully. They verified the location of every polling station and ensured that they were in safe areas with free access. On election day, they were ready to guarantee freedom of movement and to provide security. Afterwards, they supplied logistic support to the counting of votes. A number of hon Members have told me of their experiences as election observers and the pride that they felt as they saw how British forces helped to conduct those peaceful elections.

The overall land operation has been admirably led by General Sir Michael Walker, who commands the headquarters of the Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps. That multinational, but largely British-manned, headquarters has been a huge success. It has been in Bosnia for almost a year and will shortly begin its handover. Our forces in HQ ARRC will be home for Christmas.

The United Kingdom also leads the multinational division in the south-west sector of Bosnia. It has successfully presided over the largest transfer of land under the Dayton agreement and has firmly established itself with the local communities on both sides. It has brokered agreements between the factions, while ensuring strict compliance with the military provisions of Dayton. Many colleagues in the House have admired the way in which British forces have conducted themselves.

Since April, the division has completed more than 210 projects funded by the Overseas Development Administration at a cost of £5.7 million. Utilities, schools and hospitals have been rebuilt, roads have been repaired and new light industry has been set up, providing tangible benefits for the people of Bosnia from the peace agreement.

The international community will not abandon Bosnia in 1997. The primary focus must be the continuing civil operation: there is no purely military answer to this difficult political problem. The overarching political strategy of the international community needs to be put in place over the next two months and the London conference in early December may put the seal on it.

A continuing military presence may be part of the strategy. If so, we expect it to be NATO-led, like IFOR. NATO Defence Ministers, meeting in Bergen in September, set in train contingency planning for a range of possible mission objectives which would each imply different force levels.

We are anxious that a strategy, and clear objectives flowing from it, should determine whether to send a new force and, if so, of what size. We should avoid decisions on the nature of the force being taken before that strategy is in place. However, if there were to be such a force, our policy is that Britain should continue to play an important part.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): My right hon. Friend rightly pays tribute to the work of our forces in Bosnia, particularly in the area of civil reconstruction. He will know that the Royal Engineers, substantial numbers of whom are based in my constituency, have played a part in that work. Will he bear in mind the fact that the active duty tours of specialist corps, such as the Royal Engineers and the Royal Signallers, are occurring ever faster? Does he understand the overstretch to which that leads within those specialist corps?

Mr. Portillo: I understand that. The balance of skills required in the armed forces has been changed by events such as Bosnia and the demand for engineers is much greater than we predicted. I do not know whether life will continue to be like that, but we shall certainly bear in mind the lessons that we have learnt from Bosnia. If it looks as though that operation, or others like it, will continue, we shall have to weigh the implications for the balance of our forces. I join my hon. Friend in the tribute that he paid to the Engineers.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North–East): When the Secretary of State discussed the possibility of a follow-on force, he chose his language scrupulously. He was careful about precisely what he said, but can he confirm that, if the international community in general and NATO in particular conclude that there should be a follow-on military force, the United Kingdom will be part of that force?

Mr. Portillo: Yes. Although the hon. and learned Gentleman did not ask, I shall volunteer the information that the United States also needs to be part of that force.

The IFOR operation has reinforced respect for NATO and underlined the importance of American participation in European security. Perhaps most strikingly that has been true in command and control, in which an American contribution has been shown to be indispensable.

Few people now believe that a European security and defence identity should be developed outside NATO, and Britain is working with our allies to increase the visibility of such an identity within the alliance. I believe that we have carried the point that there can be only as much identity as there is capability. European identity rests not so much on institutional changes as on European nations being able to perform military tasks.

NATO is embarked on creating combined joint task force headquarters. It will do the contingency planning and establish the infrastructure to allow the alliance to respond rapidly to a crisis by dispatching a multinational force.

As part of the debate on European identity, it has been agreed that were there to be an operation involving only European powers, the Western European Union could exercise political control even though the assets of NATO would clearly be involved. That agreement gives a new role to the WEU, which I welcome. It reinforces British reasons for wishing to ensure that the European Union does not absorb or subordinate the WEU. European Union political direction over NATO assets is inconceivable.

The alliance is making progress with reorganising its command structures. If that reorganisation can be satisfactorily resolved, it could pave the way for France to play a full part in the revised military structure. The British Government warmly welcome that prospect; it would be an ideal background for NATO's decision next year on which countries from eastern and central Europe will be the first to join NATO. That timetable will be stuck to.

NATO recognises the importance of ensuring that those applicant countries who will not join then do not feel isolated or ignored. Indeed, the same is true for those who are not applicants, such as Ukraine and Russia. NATO will wish to thicken its contacts with such countries, especially by developing the programme called "Partnership for Peace". Britain has put forward ideas to make its activities more effective.

The strategic thinking that has led NATO to the concept of a combined joint task force has led us to focus also on joint tri-service activity, rapid reaction and power projection. Those are the themes of the 1996 White Paper and I am grateful to the members of the Defence Select Committee for their positive comments.

The Joint Rapid Development Force became operational on 1 August and it will markedly improve our ability to undertake a wide range of short-notice missions. In July, the capability of the permanent joint headquarters at Northwood was evaluated in Exercise Purple Viva and it came through with flying colours. On 1 August, it was declared fully operational and began to take on live operations. It currently has responsibility for our contribution to IFOR; current operations in the middle east; disaster relief; and the day-to-day management of overseas commands.

Even with 17,000 troops committed to Northern Ireland and a large force in Bosnia, we were able to send 12,000 troops to take part in Exercise Purple Star in April and May. That exercise was an early test for the PJHQ and involved elements of the JRDF in the largest combined United Kingdom and United States deployment since the Gulf.

The formation of the JRDF required us to reassess our priorities and to continue the shift in our planning away from cold war configurations. But that also reinforced my

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belief that we should get on with placing orders for the new assault ships for the Royal Navy. Albion and Bulwark will replace Fearless and Intrepid.

The Government are committed to providing the armed forces with the manpower and equipment they need to undertake the tasks that our defence policy places on them. The Government have made it clear that the big upheavals in the armed forces are over. We shall continue to provide the stability that our armed forces need.

The outturn for defence spending in 1995-96 was £21,522 million, an underspend of £203 million. I had anticipated an underspend of £500 million, but that was reduced as suppliers' performance increasingly met our original expectations.

Last year the defence budget was set at £21.9 billion in 1997-98 and £22.6 billion in 1998-99. We were able to commit ourselves to continuing the investment in defence equipment that permits our armed forces to provide the operational capability that we require of them. We are committed to providing the resources necessary to sustain the front line. We have world-class armed forces. As long as there is a Conservative Government, they will be provided with world-class equipment.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Against that background, and given the Secretary of State's statement about stability and underspend, may I take it that in no circumstances will the national air traffic service be sold, which would have a direct effect on service control? Presumably the matter has been discussed in considerable detail with the heads of the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Portillo: The service's future has been a matter of discussion and I am not in a position to make a statement about it today.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Shortly before the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), the Secretary of State mentioned world-class equipment for our armed forces. Will he comment on the F3 Tornado that crashed just off Blackpool beach on the first day of the Labour party conference? Is he able to confirm that it was the pre-certification trial flight of the first of the 14 aircraft that have been damaged by defective contractor work carried out by Airwork Ltd. at RAF St. Athan? Three of 17 aircraft have already been written off. If the damage to the aircraft that crashed at Blackpool was so serious, does that mean that the other 14 aircraft will be written off? How does that square with the Government's willingness and desire to provide world-class equipment for our armed forces?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman is getting rather carried away. The aircraft was being flown by British Aerospace. A consequence of that is that any investigation comes, I believe, under the Department of Transport and not under the Ministry of Defence. However, the investigation must be properly conducted. It does no one a service to rush to conclusions.

The aircraft was one that had been serviced badly by another contractor, but British Aerospace would not take up into the air any aircraft unless it was satisfied that it was airworthy. The hon. Gentleman is leaping to conclusions. I am not sure what vendetta he is trying to conduct.

The House had already risen for the summer recess when the Government announced in another place three important decisions on missiles and aircraft. Each led to large orders for British companies. I am grateful for the support from hon. Members which the decisions attracted.

British Aerospace and Rolls-Royce won their bid to build Nimrod 2000 as the new maritime patrol aircraft. To be able to detect and hunt the new generations of stealthy submarine is essential to a maritime power like Britain.

We chose Storm Shadow, the air-launched cruise missile from British Aerospace, for the RAF, and Brimstone from GEC will meet our requirement for an air-launched anti-armour weapon.

These orders total nearly £4 billion and directly sustain about 5,000 jobs. The people whose livelihoods depend on them will view with dismay the motions submitted to the Labour party conference calling for defence cuts, and the motion on today's Order Paper calling for cuts and the abandonment of the nuclear deterrent, which has been signed by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), the hon. Members for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) and the other usual suspects.

The Labour leadership responds predictably by pandering to its left wing. The Labour leadership offers our forces the bleak prospect of a defence review. There is no need for one. We have made the adjustment to the end of the cold war. Our smaller forces reflect that. But one cannot take a peace dividend more than once.

Labour's refusal to commit to anything more than a defence review makes the defence community highly suspicious. Labour is committed to spending increases in a number of policy areas about which its Back Benchers feel passionately. However, it is perfectly clear that Labour Back Benchers do not care about defence at all. Indeed, many want it cut. Defence would be a soft touch for a Labour Government and easy pickings for a Labour Chancellor.

Dr. John Gilbert (Dudley, East): The Secretary of State speaks for a Government who have unilaterally deprived this country of all its sub-strategic nuclear capability without negotiating any comparable reductions by possible hostile powers. Will he confirm that the conventionally armed stand-off missile is capable of being fitted with a nuclear warhead—which, I believe, is what the French intend to do? Were it to be fitted, would we retain any aircraft capable of using it in such a role?

Mr. Portillo: The right hon. Gentleman is incorrect: we have not given up our sub-strategic capability. Indeed, we have deployed the Trident submarine fleet with a sub-strategic capability. We shall stop using the WE177 free-fall bomb for that purpose in the near future. Cruise missiles could carry a range of warheads, but the British Government do not intend to equip our cruise missiles with nuclear warheads.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): As the Secretary of State has at last got round to the issue of nuclear weapons, will he tell us for what purpose this country wishes to retain such weapons, given the danger

that they pose to the rest of the world? What is the Government's response to the World Court judgment concerning the legality and safety of and the environmental damage done by the manufacture and possession of nuclear weapons? Does not that judgment give us the opportunity to start down a road of peace rather than following the road of continual nuclear arming and rearming?

Mr. Portillo: A Government with less resolve than the present one would take any opportunity to disarm the country. Under this Government, the country does not want to take that opportunity. The Government will maintain nuclear weapons because we need to maintain a deterrent that keeps this country safe. Nuclear weapons have not been uninvented in the rest of the world; indeed, they are proliferating and being developed by other states. I do not propose that this country should stand naked before such a threat to its security and survival.

Would Labour commit itself to beginning production of the Eurofighter, which is so much wanted by the Royal Air Force? I have made it clear that the British Government are ready to proceed. We are working with our partners, trusting that they, too, will be ready to move to the next stage. If it is to have good export prospects, the aircraft needs to be produced without further delay. If collaborative projects are to offer European nations a competitive alternative to buying American, we need to improve markedly on our performance to date.

Part of the answer for the future may be industrial restructuring in Europe. There are important opportunities for British companies, a number of which are in pole position. The Government have made clear their willingness to offer political support to mergers or joint ventures that make industrial sense, enhance the world competitiveness of industry and safeguard indigenous capabilities required for the effective support of our armed forces.

Part of my duty as Secretary of State is to ensure that the defence budget is spent in ways that maximise value for money in the front line and its support. The House debated thoroughly the question of the sale of the married quarters estate—

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): On the subject of the Eurofighter, is not it ironic that that example of European co-operation—perhaps one of the greatest examples of such co-operation in recent history—is being endangered by the Maastricht convergence criteria, which have put pressure on the German budget?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The Secretary of State will be aware that John Weston of British Aerospace foresees the creation of a single European defence company by the end of the decade as the only means of withstanding the weight force of the United States mega merged companies. In his Farnborough speech in early September, the Deputy Prime Minister endorsed that view. Is that also the view of the Secretary of State for Defence?

Mr. Portillo: Collaboration in Europe serves two purposes. The first is to provide competition against American products in the short term. In the longer term, America and Europe will face strong competition from the far east. In both instances, European industry must strengthen itself to face the competitive challenges that lie ahead. [*Interruption.*]I am sorry, did I miss the hon. Gentleman's point?

Mr. Anderson: The point that I made was that in Farnborough the Deputy Prime Minister appeared to endorse the move towards a single European defence company by the end of the decade. Was he speaking with the concurrence of the Secretary of State for Defence?

Mr. Portillo: The point that I made—which I make again and rest on—was that the Government want to give political support to changes in Europe that are industrially driven. Industrial logic should dictate the formation of industries in Europe, not political diktat. Clearly, we are in for a period of change.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside) *rose—*

Mr. Portillo: I shall give way, but I am beginning to abuse the time of the House.

Mr. Walker: Would not Rolls-Royce find it difficult to be merely a European company?

Mr. Portillo: Absolutely. Nothing that I have said about European collaboration should be held to be exclusive. British companies also have important joint ventures with American companies. It is extremely important for British companies to maintain the flexibility to operate with partners in both continents—and, indeed, even more broadly than that.

On European competition, we face the problem that the United States has production lines for its armed forces which are 10 times as long as the production lines of any one European country. We should think about how to restructure and produce collaboratively so as to have longer production runs. We must do better than we have done on Eurofighter, because the delays are making the product uncompetitive.

I was about to say that the House debated thoroughly the sale of the married quarters estate. Over the summer, we achieved an excellent sale. We exchanged contracts with Annington Homes on 24 September for a sale price of £1,662 million, which significantly exceeded general expectations.

Annington does not wish to exercise the site exchange option during the first 25 years. As that has been a cause of some anxiety, I hope that that decision will increase further the House's confidence in the sale. Sir Thomas Macpherson, a distinguished ex-soldier and chairman of Annington, has expressed clearly his understanding of the importance of family security to the serving soldier, sailor or airman. His support for the integrity of the patch matches my own. Such issues are important if we are to

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recruit and retain the right number and quality of personnel. The Select Committee on Defence has expressed its concern on that issue too.

Sir Michael Bett's independent review of the services' manpower, career and remuneration structure focused on some of the issues. In July, I informed the House that much work was still required on the detailed options contained in it. There are complex issues to be considered, and we are taking the necessary time to get them right.

It is no part of Government policy to recruit below establishment. We want to see the Army's shortfall of 4,000 made good. We recognise the impact of excess cadreisation on effectiveness, and the consequences of a shortfall in numbers for tour intervals—and hence for family life. Pushing up the numbers is a top priority for the Government and for the Army board. One of our enemies in that effort is a false impression that numbers in the armed forces are in decline and opportunities with them. It is not so. The forces are recruiting and they offer to young people the prospect of great experiences and a fine career.

Today no employer offers a job for life. The services can give more assurance about job security than most. Few other jobs offer the range of experience provided by the armed forces; nor the opportunities for teamwork, personal development, leadership, responsibility and excitement. It is a wonderful career for a young person. Anyone who enlists will be joining an elite of fine people who work to defend us and our values, and who are seen by the world to be doing so with enormous skill and professionalism.

I end by reverting to the subject of NATO, with a word of caution. NATO was formed to provide collective defence and, as it evolves, hard defence must remain its core. There is a danger of learning the wrong lessons from Bosnia. The situation was risky and NATO has had a great success there, but, in the event, we have faced no major attacks on our forces and therefore no test of NATO's fighting capability.

Not all future operations will be like that. As recently as 1991, against Iraq, we were involved in high-intensity conflict, against a huge army with enormous quantities of armour, a stock of chemical weapons and some capability in ballistic missiles. It is not difficult to imagine another such conflict, but as time goes by the missiles and the weapons of mass destruction will be vastly more effective. Therefore, we should not assume that all future conflicts will be like the Gulf, with a small number of allied casualties. We could in time face a highly capable adversary.

NATO must not go soft on defence, nor must it be lured into seeing itself as primarily a peacekeeping organisation. The non-alliance countries which have made a valuable contribution to IFOR have had a valuable experience of operating with NATO forces, but they have not yet experienced what NATO is. NATO must remain ready for high-intensity conflict, with all its members committed to collective defence and to sustaining the military capabilities needed for it. The alliance must be capable of rapid and effective response to serious threats to its security.

Britain under this Government will be a dependable ally. We will live up to our responsibilities and provide to national defence and to the alliance highly capable forces trained and equipped to meet any threat that might be presented in modern warfare.

4.52 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'declines to support the policy of the Government as set out in the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1996; condemns the instability caused to Britain's armed forces by Government mismanagement; recognises that the UK defence industry is a strategic national asset in both defence and economic terms; notes that the shortfall in the strength of the British Army numbers 4000 personnel; is concerned that the resulting overstretch is undermining the morale and operational effectiveness of the armed forces; condemns the manner in which the defence forces and defence industry are being run down in an ad-hoc and piecemeal way; recognises that the armed forces and defence industry require a long-term strategic overview which can only be achieved through the establishment of a strategic defence review; condemns the continued financial waste and mismanagement by Ministers; urges the Government to take action to address the world landmine crisis and to ban the export, import and transfer of all forms of anti-personnel landmine; urges a positive approach to the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty negotiations; and congratulates the work carried out by British forces in the defence of Britain and her interests in helping to maintain international stability in peacekeeping operations throughout the world.'.

Over the past few years, I have had the honour of meeting many members of our armed forces both here and abroad and those who support them in the Ministry of Defence and, indeed, the defence industry. The commitment and the skill demonstrated by those people in the service of their country is vital to our overall defence capability.

The expertise and resourcefulness of the men and women who serve in our Army, Navy and Air Force is recognised world wide. Whenever the United Nations requires help, its first port of call is invariably Britain. It is a matter of pride—I know that the Secretary of State agrees with me—that at one time last year more British troops were serving in United Nations forces than troops from any other nation. Currently, our troops are serving, and contributing their knowledge and prowess, in no fewer than 33 countries. That is a matter of pride. I pay tribute to their dedication and commitment, which often truly goes beyond the call of duty. That was tragically brought home to all of us last week when we heard of Warrant Officer James Bradwell. I know that the whole House will join me and the Defence Secretary in condemning the cowardly attack on the Lisburn Army base. Our thoughts are with James Bradwell's family and his loved ones.

I also pay tribute to the people who often do not get any recognition: members of the reserves—more than 1,200 of whom are in Bosnia—and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, who ply the seas, ensuring that our Royal Navy is able to sail. We really are most fortunate to have them, as I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree.

Since taking on the shadow defence portfolio, I have striven to establish consensus, wherever possible, on issues that affect Britain's defence and our security. The Opposition have done that because we believe that it

should be possible, in many spheres, to strike a bipartisan approach on many of the fundamental issues. Furthermore, many of the decisions that we are taking today will have far-reaching implications, running into many decades to come. Many of the questions to which the Secretary of State alluded—the expansion of NATO, perhaps planning the next attack aircraft for the second quarter of the next century—are matters that different Governments may have to handle. We in the Labour party are willing to offer a consensual approach on the critical matters that affect the security of our country.

In that spirit, I shall make a few comments in support of certain issues in the Defence White Paper. In paragraph 106, emphasis is placed on the need for "collective defence", a point with which the Secretary of State concluded his speech, and a point with which the Labour party concurs whole-heartedly, as I shall try to demonstrate. Labour is completely in agreement with that strategy. The days are gone when we could do everything alone. We are proud that it was a Labour Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, who was the key player in the establishment of NATO, an alliance which, as the Secretary of State agreed, has stood the test of time for more than 50 years. I look forward to the expansion of NATO, as my party says in its documents.

In a sense, the whole thrust of Labour's policy, as outlined in our policy document, is that a secure Britain can be best guaranteed in a secure world, and with the end of the cold war it is imperative that we seek to establish international stability, not only through NATO but through other avenues, such as the United Nations or the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

I also support the White Paper's arguments in paragraphs 127-28 against the European Union having responsibility for Britain's defence policy. Again in our policy document we state quite clearly—I shall quote it to the House so that there can be no misconceptions—

"Labour does not support the establishment of a European army or proposals to give the European Union a military competence . . . We believe that efforts to develop a common defence policy should concentrate on strengthening the Western European Union as the European contribution to NATO."

I believe that, with that statement, we are not very distant from the Government.

For that to be realised, however, our European allies must begin to take defence, especially the necessity of spending adequate resources, more seriously. To put it bluntly, NATO can do very little without the involvement of the United States. The UK and France may have considerable resources, but even our actions are limited without American intelligence and airlift and sealift capabilities.

We may have had the force structures in Europe to fight a static conventional war against the Warsaw pact, but we are ill-equipped for the future task of peacekeeping and peacemaking, or indeed any challenge to our sovereignty and our soil, to which the Secretary of State alluded. There is no point in European Union countries bemoaning the fact that American troops are everywhere, even in Bosnia, when those same countries refuse to allocate resources. Rhetoric without action does not make for credible defence. That is the lesson of the century.

The size and might of the United States military machine cannot be over-emphasised. It has personnel and equipment capabilities on a scale that Europe simply cannot match. This summer I had an opportunity to spend a little time with the American military, seeing its capabilities and hearing about its plans for the future. Its defence capability is quite awesome and that was graphically brought home to me as I flew into San Diego. In that port alone, I counted more United States naval vessels than are in the whole of the Royal Navy. That shows the commitment and capability of the United States.

In many spheres, the United States is a decade ahead of we Europeans and the gap is widening, especially in intelligence gathering, man-surveillance, information technology and logistics, air and sea transport. Although the American budget may have been reduced—it is interesting to note that it is rising again this year—the United States still spends twice as much on defence as the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy put together. Our defence capability would be greatly weakened without active American participation in NATO. When defence is being discussed at this year's intergovernmental conference, that fact will constantly need to be recalled.

In turn, the Americans often quote Bosnia as an example of where the Europeans have failed, and they are correct. Too many European nations lack the will and especially the resources to solve the problem. The US involvement following the Dayton accord and IFOR has moved the process forward and I am delighted that British forces have played such an important part in UNPROFOR and IFOR. All three services have played a crucial role and we are proud of that.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): My hon. Friend mentions Bosnia and the Secretary of State also spoke about the crucial role of the Americans there. Does my hon. Friend agree that the lesson to be learned is that if America did not play a role in Bosnia it would be impossible for European powers to play a constructive role in that country? If that is the lesson to be learned, should we not pay some heed to the future possibility of a European role in another conflict, perhaps in an area in which America was not prepared to play a role? Does my hon. Friend agree that we might want to prepare for that eventuality?

Dr. Clark: I understand the thrust of my hon. Friend's point and I know that he was in Bosnia observing the elections. The whole purpose of strengthening the role of the Western European Union within NATO is so that it can undertake in future those roles in Bosnia that we were not able to undertake. In the Petersberg approaches, as it is commonly known, we should be able to act as a European pillar of NATO to carry out such functions without relying on the Americans.

As the IFOR mandate draws to a close, I was pleased to hear the Secretary of State say that he intended to try to ensure that, if there is international agreement so to do, British troops would play a part in IFOR 2 or whatever it is to be called. As he knows, that is also my view and after my last visit to Bosnia in May-June, I communicated to the House and to the Minister my view that that is exactly what we should do. However, given our other problems, almost 10,000 troops there are too many and we should consider a brigade size of 5,000 to 6,000.

Such is the consensus that I agreed with virtually everything that the Secretary of State said in the first 38 to 39 minutes of his speech. However, it is what he did

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not say that causes us great concern. Although we seek consensus, we also have the right to be critical of many aspects of the Government's approach such as the absence of strategic planning; the dominance of short-term and ad hoc decision making; the mistreatment of the interests of our armed forces—for example, through the sale of housing estates and the response to the Gulf war veterans—and the indecision and vacillation over the Devonport and Rosyth royal dockyards. Such matters annoy us and make us critical of the Government.

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government have been guilty of gross mismanagement in connection with Rosyth dockyard and that it is completely unacceptable that the Secretary of State made no announcement today on the proposed privatisation of the dockyard although we were assured that a statement would be made by September last year?

Dr. Clark: As my hon. Friend knows, I have had the pleasure of visiting Rosyth a number of times with her. She has fought hard and doughtily for that dockyard. Some months ago, the workers and management at Rosyth drew up plans to go forward and it is not good enough for those people to be kept on a piece of string by a Government who seem incapable of making a decision. I plead with the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to make an announcement about that, and especially about Rosyth dockyard, in his winding-up speech so that the workers and management there will know where they are. It is important that the process of rebuilding that community is started quickly.

Conservative Members used to claim with great pride that theirs was the party of defence, but the record in recent years shows that it is the party of defence cuts. As a percentage of gross domestic product, defence spending has been slashed by the Government by some 46 per cent. since its peak in 1985. Rumours persist that more defence cuts are to come in this year's Budget in an attempt to fill the black hole in Britain's public finances. Of course, we have seen this before and should not be surprised.

Just 12 months ago, I remember the Prime Minister thundering, if he does thunder, at his party conference, "No more defence cuts under me." Just 12 months ago, I remember the House approving a defence budget of just over £22 billion and Conservative Member after Conservative Member expressing concern about the level of spending and calling for no more cuts. However, just six weeks later, the Chancellor announced in the Budget further cuts of £700 million. Therefore, it is no surprise to see that the Select Committee on Defence, which is chaired by the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), concludes its good report by stating:

> "We cannot recommend the 1996 Statement on the Defence Estimates to the House unless Ministers make clear in the debate that this year's Statement will not again be undermined by further defence cuts in the 1996 Budget or by any other means."

Although I listened carefully to the Secretary of State, I heard no such commitment. I hope that the Minister will give the House that commitment in his winding-up speech, otherwise I expect those hon. Members who serve on the Select Committee on Defence and others to join us in the Lobby. I hope that Ministers will respond positively on that issue.

I was not surprised by the Select Committee's reaction because in the debate on the defence estimates on 17 October 1994, I warned the House that there was a shortfall in the Government's spending plans for defence for the financial year 1996-97 of some £2 billion. In the end, the Government could make up the shortfall only by cutting defence spending by £700 million and selling off the married housing estate for £1.6 billion. If one adds up those figures, the total matches the amount of underspend referred to by the Secretary of State. What a way to run the defence of our country!

The large cuts in defence spending have resulted in large reductions in service manpower. Since the end of the cold war, the Conservative Government have cut the size of our armed forces by a third. It is worth recalling the claim in the Conservative party's 1992 election manifesto that Labour

> "would devastate our armed forces by cuts of at least 27 per cent., which would lead to huge job losses".

It was not a Labour Government who made those cuts, but the Conservative Government.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): My hon. Friend is making a powerful point. Is that the reason why so few Conservative Back Benchers are here today? In my 18 years in the House I have not seen a defence debate take place with so few Conservatives waiting in the Chamber to speak. Are they covered in embarrassment for the reasons that my hon. Friend is so eloquently outlining?

Dr. Clark: I am trying to be consensual, so I will not follow my hon. Friend's comments. However, the House will have heard what he said.

I enjoyed the Secretary of State's speech to the Conservative party conference last week. It was a huge improvement on last year's speech, and I am glad that he has listened to the advice given by not only the Labour party but the professionals and his right hon. and hon. Friends. He was wise not to talk too much about defence, and he was on much stronger ground when launching his bid to be the leader of the Tory party after the election. I know that I speak for the whole House in wishing him well in his efforts to be the Leader of the Opposition. He has our full support.

The Secretary of State got carried away by his own eloquence in one part of his speech and informed the nation:

> "Dogs bark, birds sing, and Labour Governments cut defence".

He forgot the truth—that the Government have cut our Royal Air Force by 38 per cent., our Royal Navy by 31 per cent. and our Army by 28 per cent. That is the real record of the Conservative Government on defence. Before anyone tries to jump in, I must state that it is a matter of record that each post-war Labour Government has spent a higher percentage of GDP on defence than the Conservatives. The record is there to be seen and to be judged.

The problems have been exacerbated by the manner in which the Government have approached the cuts. There has been an unco-ordinated series of ad hoc and piecemeal cuts based not on a military or strategic rationale but merely on the demands of the Treasury. The result has been a mismanagement of our armed forces on a scale never seen before. What type of Government can reduce

our Army by 28 per cent. but then find that they have a shortfall of 4,000 troops? It takes a special kind of genius to achieve that—and, of course, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), is in charge of the armed forces.

While troop numbers have been reduced, our troops have been involved in more operational duties throughout the world—33, as I have mentioned—than at any time since the end of the second world war. The Government have made the cuts but increased our commitments. The Secretary of State rightly said that there are about 10,000 British troops in Bosnia, and almost double that number are in Northern Ireland. Almost a third of our Army is tied up at any one moment in just two theatres of operation. Equal numbers of troops are training to go to those theatres and equal numbers have just returned, needing rest and recuperation. That overstretch is one of the most serious problems affecting our armed forces today.

Mr. Mans: I presume from the hon. Gentleman's remarks that he thinks that we have too many commitments and not enough troops to carry them out. Which commitments would he get rid of?

Dr. Clark: At the end of the cold war, we ought to have had a strategic defence review to assess the risks and threats facing Britain—

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): Answer the question.

Dr. Clark: I am answering the question. Only then could we have made judgments about the necessary commitments—that is the key—for Britain.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): Does my hon. Friend agree that now that the Ministry of Defence service stock has been sold and the money passed to the Treasury, the lease-back arrangements that will cost hundreds of millions of pounds per year are in effect a defence cut? Would he welcome—as I would—a statement from the Government on what they will cut from the defence budget to pay for the leasing back of those properties?

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point, but Ministers are not concerned about the on-going costs of the defence budget. They think only as far as May, and they know that another Government will have to pick up the pieces and make sure that the defence of our country is viable.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Clark: I shall make a little progress, and give way later.

The problem of recruitment and retention is particularly acute. It is unbelievable that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces has not foreseen this problem, and I wonder what he has been doing. Any demographic analysis will have shown a reduction in the pool of potential recruits, but Ministers have ignored that. By their cuts to our armed forces, the Government have not only lowered morale but reduced the attraction of pursuing a military career.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the services find themselves in a difficult position because they are trying to recruit the high-quality young men and women who are also being sought by the burgeoning British industry? What measures would he adopt to improve recruitment to our armed forces that the Government have not adopted?

Dr. Clark: Let me make one general point. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I shall answer the Minister by making some positive suggestions, which may surprise him. Five of the best areas for recruitment into the infantry in this country are the northern counties of Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and Teesside.

Mr. Mans: And North Lancashire.

Dr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman is correct, but I am referring to the King's Own Border Regiment. In those areas, there are still massive levels of unemployment among the under-25s. In Tyneside, the figures are between 10 and 20 per cent. It is remarkable that our armed forces have been unable to attract recruits from those traditional areas.

Let me try to give some reasons for that, because the Minister has challenged me on this. By their failure to recruit from all sections of society, the Government have made the problem worse. Labour has long argued that insufficient effort is being expended on recruiting young people from the ethnic minorities. *[Interruption.]* The Minister may disagree, but he should know that that is the case—he has been hauled before the race relations board.

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman—as he did on "Newsnight" the other night—is falsifying my position most disgracefully. Would he care to withdraw his final remark? I have never been hauled in front of the race relations board.

Dr. Clark: I withdraw the personal allegation. The hon. Gentleman has not been called before that board, but, as he knows, it found the Ministry of Defence wanting and is undertaking a monitoring exercise—the report is due in March next year—such is the level of concern.

The Minister's arrogant attitude explains the problem with recruiting from ethnic minorities. The newspapers repeatedly carry reports of cases of racial bullying in the forces. The latest involved a black recruit being forced to carry a spear. I am sure that all hon. Members on both sides of the House find that almost incomprehensible. I think that the Minister is saying that I am barmy—I do not know if that is what he said—but does he deny that there is racial abuse in the armed forces? Does he deny that that recruit was forced to parade around with a spear? I am giving him an opportunity to deny it and if he does not do so, I must take it that that is the case.

Clearly, standard recruitment requirements need revising. Does the Minister realise that, unless a special dispensation is given, any recruit with a debt in excess of

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£750 is barred from entering the services? That debt includes a mortgage, a car loan or a student loan. That is pure nonsense. The hon. Gentleman nods his head. I can assure him that I went into the matter carefully with a recruitment officer from one of our major regiments only last month.

Are Ministers aware that, unless both parents were born in Britain, Ireland or the Commonwealth, a dispensation has to be given for a son or daughter to be eligible for recruitment? I think that I am right in saying that the Secretary of State would not meet current recruitment criteria and yet no one would doubt his pro-British sentiment. The children of European Union citizens should be good enough for eligibility for recruitment to the British Army.

The Government have been far too complacent about recruitment and retention—an attitude that has led to the problems of overstretch. I have talked mainly of the Army, but I am thinking also of the Royal Navy. We have a proud naval tradition. Ninety-two per cent. of our goods come to and go from this country via the sea and 400 ships dock in Britain each day.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): None of them British.

Dr. Clark: No, none of them is British. One would not have thought that we had that tradition from the way in which the Government have treated the Royal Navy. Under the Conservatives, 30,000 jobs have gone and the Royal Navy is now smaller than the American coastguard.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I fear that the hon. Gentleman is shedding crocodile tears. Would he be kind enough to spell out exactly what he means by a comprehensive strategic review, bearing in mind the fact that six successive Labour party conferences have voted for a reduction in defence spending of £4.5 billion, which would mean no force levels?

Dr. Clark: I shall come to the substantive point of the hon. Lady's intervention about the defence review. As regards cuts in defence spending, that is old hat in the Labour party. There was insufficient interest in the issue in the constituency Labour party for it to be debated for the past two years.

Let us move on to the Royal Navy and a matter that Conservative Members will not be comfortable with. We have only 27—not 35—operational frigates and destroyers and the average age of our support ships is 18 years. Not a single new one is being ordered. Even new procurement orders have been delayed. The Horizon frigate will not now come into service until 2006, even if it is on time. There is a gap in frigate cover. It comes as no surprise, therefore, to read the comments of Captain Richard Sharpe—an acknowledged expert in naval matters—in *Jane's Fighting Ships* about the Government's approach to the Navy. He says:

"Someone needs to cut the Gordian Knot of overwhelming national complacency before the damage becomes irreparable if it has not already happened."

Mr. Bill Walker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that I am one of the hon. Members who constantly calls for additional defence expenditure. On the basis of what he has been saying, will he confirm that he, too, will be calling for additional defence expenditure?

Dr. Clark: We have always said that we will provide whatever resources are necessary for the defence of Britain. That is what we said at the last election and that is what we shall say at the next. The hon. Gentleman is knowledgeable and interested and he has a lot of background experience in the Royal Air Force. He knows, as I know, that things are far from comfortable in the RAF. He knows that, because of lack of spares, on many occasions only six out of 48 Tornado GR1s are available, and that those fly only because others have been cannibalised. Equipment delays have caused all sorts of problems and one has to wonder whether the loss of so many aircraft in the past 12 months is in some way related.

In a letter to the *Daily Mail* in May, the Gulf war hero Flight Lieutenant John Nichol suggested that overstretch was a major factor in the increase in accidents.

Mr. Soames: Oh Lord!

Dr. Clark: Thanks for the accolade, but do not call me that yet.

John Nichol—a respected RAF pilot and hero of the Gulf war—wrote:

"Our aircrew are trying to achieve more with fewer resources, being stretched to a point where safety is compromised."

Those are not my words, but the words of an expert.

When I talk to the men and women of our armed forces, time and again they say that they are being asked to do too much with too few resources.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot): We have still not heard an answer to the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker). Is the hon. Gentleman committing himself to additional expenditure? He is accusing the Government of cutting resources. He can fudge as much as he likes about expenditure being whatever is necessary, but is he committing himself to additional expenditure?

Dr. Clark: I do not think that the cavalry has come to the Government's rescue. Let me say it again. At the last election, we pledged that we would provide whatever resources are necessary for the defence of Britain. I think that that is pretty clear and in a moment I will say how we shall reach a conclusion about what is necessary for the security of our nation.

One of the criticisms of the Government by politicians on both sides of the House and certainly by professionals in the military has been its failure to grasp the very nettle that the Government raised about taking key strategic decisions. It is remarkable that, of all the countries in the world, we are the only one that has not had a strategic defence review. The Government played around at the edges. We know that the Government had "Options for Change"—although they initially failed to involve the chiefs of staff in that, such was their confidence in them.

Later, the defence costs study was announced not by the Defence Secretary but by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. As I have told the House before, it was a

defence costs study, not a defence needs study. What else could we expect from the Government? Decisions are made not on strategic or defence criteria but mainly on criteria demanded by the Treasury.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will my hon. Friend ask Ministers again whether they intend to go ahead with the privatisation of national air traffic services, even though there has been no consultation with the RAF or the civil aviation authorities? Only those who seek to make enormous amounts of money for themselves from privatisation have been consulted.

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend raises a pertinent point. It was not good enough for the Secretary of State to avoid answering the very direct question that she put to him earlier. I hope that the Minister will address that. I hope that it is not another example of selling the nation's assets to the friends and bankers of the Conservative party.

A Labour Government would be prepared to face up to the responsibility. We shall establish a strategic defence review. We have made it clear in our documents and discussions that the review will not be a cost-cutting exercise. It will report within six months of its establishment and will provide not only a blueprint for our security but stability for our armed forces and defence industry. On top of that, Labour will institutionalise long-term strategic thinking in the MOD. That is critical and I wish that the Government had faced up to that reality. Without it, there can be no strategic plan to the size and shape of our forces.

Mr. Soames: Will the hon. Gentleman define what he means by stability for the armed forces?

Dr. Clark: It is the opposite of the situation that prevails under the Government. The armed forces complain that they have no sense of direction. They do not know what is being asked of them. They know only that they get more and more commitments, based on no strategic plan, with fewer and fewer resources.

Mr. Portillo: Is the hon. Gentleman claiming that the armed forces and the chiefs of staff favour a defence review?

Dr. Clark: I would not expect the chiefs of staff, given their constitutional position, to come out against the declared policy of the Government because they, like us and the Government, believe that the Defence Secretary is the constitutional head of our defence effort, not of the military.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Does my hon. Friend accept that a sensible, properly conducted review would not only serve this country's interest but might provide material with which we could persuade our European partners to carry a fairer share of the burden? Unfortunately, over the past few years, the Government have seemed most reluctant to do anything to persuade them to change their approach.

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend again makes a powerful added argument for a strategic defence review.

I know that the Government will not have it, but many members of the armed forces feel let down by them. There are many examples, such as the treatment of our Gulf war veterans. I heard what the Defence Secretary said about that. For three and a half years, we have argued that the Government have a moral duty fully to investigate the occurrence of illnesses among our Gulf war veterans. It is a moral duty because we asked our soldiers to serve in that conflict. We must do all that we can to ascertain whether there is something wrong with those soldiers. If we have to send our troops to the Gulf again, we would owe it to them to be able to give them assurances about their health.

There may or may not be a Gulf war syndrome but there appears to a concentration of unexplained illnesses among our soldiers who served in the Gulf. Three and a half years ago, I called for an independent medical inquiry and a full epidemiological study to examine the allegations. Three and a half years later, Ministers are still dragging their feet. It is clear that the Government had made up their mind before any medical research had been undertaken. That is the action of a Government who are not committed to the welfare of our armed forces. It was only after concerted pressure from veterans' groups and from the House that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces conceded and established an epidemiological study this January. It is a scandal that such grudging and limited action has been taken more than five years after the Gulf war.

Last week, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces wrote to the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee to point out that an error had been made in evidence given by the Ministry about the Gulf war. Concern was expressed about the use of organophosphate chemicals, about which I learnt much when I was handling the agricultural portfolio and which have had a devastating effect on many sheep farmers. Many of the symptoms associated with those chemicals have been experienced by Gulf war veterans.

I read carefully what the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said. He accepted full responsibility and in December 1994 told the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin):

"I advised you at the time"—

note the use of the personal pronoun—

"that one OP pesticide was used to treat Iraqi prisoners of war and that, while OP insecticides were available to British Forces in the Gulf, they were not used."

The Minister discovered that that information was wrong. In my exuberance, I may have offended him and I apologise. I retract the comment that I made about him but I want to challenge him on several specific points. He knows, or should know, that that information was wrong because an Army document of 31 March 1991 headed, "Post Operational Report: Hygiene—4th Armoured Brigade", made it clear that organophosphates had been used.

Will the Minister confirm that paragraph 1 of that document begins:

"The theatre requirements were misinterpreted causing confusion, this lead to a half hygiene section being wrongly deployed to BAOR"?

[Dr. Clark]

Will he further confirm that paragraph 3 states:

"Soldiers SOP"—

standard operating procedure—

"Equipment—inferior issue to junior ranks . . . NBC canisters had expired, no bergens"—

rucksacks—

"issued, soldiers had to locally purchase this essential item"?

The next paragraph states:

"No hygiene equipment was sent to theatre with the deployment of the fourth brigade."

Perhaps the Minister can now understand why I was angry. He should have read that document, which should have been available for him in his red box in December 1994 with the memorandum that went to the Select Committee.

Mr. Robathan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Clark: First let me make this important point.

The truth is that at no time was personal protective equipment issued to those troops applying the insecticides—often organophosphates. Furthermore, orders were given that nuclear, biological and chemical suits should not be worn for insecticidal spraying since that would undoubtedly have led to a degradation of the equipment. In other words, the integrity of the equipment was placed above the safety of our soldiers. I do not apologise for my anger, but I apologise for the words I used against hon. Members. If that information was withheld, however, what else is being withheld from the public?

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Gentleman raises a serious matter which needs a full airing. Can the hon. Gentleman please inform the House who wrote the report and what rank he held? That report contains serious, devastating comments, but if it was just written by one person, who perhaps did not have the full facts at his fingertips, it is important to know that. If it was written by someone in a more senior position, that is also important to know.

Dr. Clark: I know that the hon. Gentleman served for a period in the British Army. In the past, he and I have discussed senior non-commissioned officers, and I know that he shares my great respect for them and that he holds them in the highest regard. That document was written by a sergeant in the 4th Brigade who was responsible for hygiene. It was repeatedly drawn to the attention of the majors in command of that particular detachment and it was submitted as an official paper on 31 March 1991. I have made my point and the House can judge on it.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Is it not a fact that not only was there evidence in the documents that my hon. Friend has cited, but, had a proper investigation been conducted, the evidence from individuals who were directly involved and responsible would also have been made available? The real gravamen of the charge against the Government is that no political directive was issued for a full investigation that should have been conducted earlier on. If there had been, not only the documents quoted by my hon. Friend but evidence from individual witnesses would have become known.

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend once again explains clearly my concern and that of so many other Opposition Members. I must say that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces has accepted personal responsibility for the issue on a number of occasions because he is involved in resolving the problem. He has repeatedly told me that he considers it a personal issue and I know that he cares about it, but we have a strong feeling that the Government have not treated the problem with the same thoroughness and commitment as the United States forces have.

Mr. Hargreaves *rose—*

Dr. Clark: I have gone on far too long and I must make some progress.

Earlier, I was challenged about Labour's policy on the defence industry. Let me make it clear that a Labour Government will order Eurofighter, if the Government have not gone ahead and done so. I hope that by then they will have done so, and, unless the Secretary of State tells us about an early general election, we expect that order to go ahead. We have always supported the Eurofighter and we believe that our RAF needs it. If it needs it, it must have it because if we are to send our young men and women up in aeroplanes in dangerous areas, they must have the very best equipment.

It is a bit thick for the Government to hint that the Opposition are half-hearted about Britain's defence industry. I must admit that we have a different approach from the Government on the defence industry. We have made that quite clear. The Tories' hands-off approach continues to fail Britain, with our defence industry under-performing time and time again.

Labour believes that our defence industrial base is a strategic asset for our defence effort and economy. It is a preserve of high-tech innovation that Britain cannot afford to lose. It is for that reason that, two years ago, we published our document, "Strategy for a Secure Future" in which we argue for a coherent strategic review of our defence industry. Such a review has been warmly welcomed by every defence factory that I and my team have visited in the past two years. It stands in sharp contrast to the charade that masquerades as the Government's approach to the defence industry. It therefore came as no surprise to read a recent Government document for Britain's submission to the United Nations arms register, which candidly described their position as:

"the United Kingdom does not have an industrial strategy which aims to develop such a capability".

That is the Government's comment on our defence industry. There we have it, clear and concise: there is no strategy for the defence industry. No wonder that on 29 June *The Economist* reported that, since the hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot)

"became procurement Minister a year ago, policy has appeared to lurch in all directions."

We now know why that is the case—the Conservative Government have no strategy for our defence industry. What a critical time to have no strategy, when Europe is crying out for a new order. We could take the lead in Europe, but no, our Government are not prepared to do that.

Over the years, the Conservative Government have proclaimed that they are the party of strong defence. People actually believed it, at least some of them did, but the Government are believed no longer. They have simply slashed defence spending while continuing our

commitments. Overstretch is the order of the day. By their failure to conduct a strategic defence review, by their obsession with privatisation and by their inability to plan long term, they have shown not only their incompetence, but that the security of Britain is no longer safe in their hands.

5.46 pm

Sir John Cope (Northavon): First, I endorse the tribute paid by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the Army and other services in Northern Ireland. As the House knows, for a short while I was security Minister for Northern Ireland and I saw the work of the armed forces at first hand. My right hon. Friend was right to emphasise the role of private soldiers and the junior non-commissioned officers on whom a particular strain is placed when on duty. Of course, the recent murder of the warrant officer in Lisburn makes it absolutely clear that everyone in the armed forces is at risk.

We have just listened to a speech from the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) in which he started by calling for a bipartisan defence policy. For the bulk of his speech, however, he departed from that theme. I found the content of his speech and that of the official Labour amendment contradictory. The amendment starts off by criticising instability in defence policy, but then calls for another review. Whatever else is required, it is not another great review. We all know, however, that that is Labour's only defence policy, and has been for some years.

Later, the hon. Gentleman tried to give the impression that he would increase defence spending without actually saying that. I take it that that means that he does not have the permission of the shadow Chancellor to say anything of that sort. Instead, like some of his colleagues in the shadow Cabinet, he tries to give the impression that he would increase spending, without saying so. If those on the Labour Front Bench wish to carry conviction on defence matters, they need to be much more specific than the hon. Gentleman has been.

The only clear Labour policy is that set out in the other Labour amendment, which has not been selected, standing in the name of the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) and 20 of his right hon. and hon. Friends. It reveals that the call of the hon. Member for South Shields for consensus and a bipartisan approach falls not merely on deaf ears, but blocked ones in his party.

The policy put forward in the second amendment is at least coherent and consistent, but it is misguided and wrong. It also makes clear the difficulties that a Labour Government—should such a thing come about—would encounter. Twenty Labour Members are fundamentally against Labour's official defence policy—and that is when we are still in the run-up to a general election, when Labour Members are supposed to be behaving themselves.

Among other things, the second amendment would stop all conventional arms trade from the United Kingdom. My constituents who work in the aerospace industry will note that carefully, and I shall not be reticent in pointing it out to them. Governments have an important part to play in selling arms, and their attitude to the trade matters. The amendment also mentions diversification and retraining. The idea that British Aerospace or Rolls-Royce can be taught something about civilian sales is ludicrous. Both companies have large, effective civilian aerospace business and do their expert best to ensure that it flourishes.

The main subject that I wish to talk about is defence procurement. My right hon. and hon. Friends have often heard me extolling the benefit of programmes in which I have a constituency interest through Rolls-Royce, British Aerospace and the many other smaller suppliers in this highly complex industry. I wish to mention briefly some specific programmes. METEOR is an excellent European system that has been offered in response to the RAF's air-to-air requirement—SR(A) 1239. It will go extremely well, both operationally and industrially, with the Eurofighter 2000. The announcements in July, to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred—particularly those relating to Nimrod 2000 and the conventionally armed stand-off missile—were welcome, but there was a nasty day or two in July when it seemed that there might not be an announcement and, instead, a great rethink of the parameters and a change in the rules.

The bidding process is incredibly complex and expensive for the companies involved. It would have been wrong on two grounds to change the rules at that late stage in the competition. First, it would be grossly unfair and highly damaging to the companies taking part to make them waste money tendering for a contract that, eventually, was not awarded to anyone. Secondly, it would ultimately cost the Government more. The tenders for their next contracts—whatever they might have been—would inevitably have had an extra safety margin built in against the possibility of the Government abandoning the operation. For many firms, the additional risk of tendering in the face of such a threat would not make it worth while. It is important that the Government—in their own interest and in the interest of value for money—retain the integrity of the tender process.

Value for money is extremely important—as an ex-Treasury hand, I am concerned about it. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was responsible for the spending side when I was at the Treasury—I was helping to raise the money. When people talk to me about public expenditure and Government money, I think about the companies that we were pressing for VAT and the difficulties that we had extracting it from them. I also think of the pleas that are always made to Treasury Ministers at this time of year about the difficulties that the tax burden creates for the public, companies and employers.

The first duty of the House is to safeguard the public purse. The money that we extract from taxpayers must be spent wisely. The tendering process is important in that context. We all realise that it is difficult for the Government and the armed forces to decide which weapons and equipment they will need and be able to afford many years ahead when they come into service, and to stick to those decisions to the end. That is what should be done as much as possible if we are to secure value for money. I know that Ministry of Defence Ministers realise that, but there was a day or two in July when it seemed that the Government collectively might not have realised it.

As the Ministry of Defence is the largest single customer of British industry, it should also be the most intelligent. The future of a large section of British industry, as well as the future of British defence, depends

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on it. What is more, if British industry does not continue to flourish, we will not be able to afford British defence, which would have damaging consequences not only for Britain, but for the world. I agree with the tributes paid to the British armed forces, who carry out fantastic work and are a fine example to all.

I wish to make two general points about the defence procurement process. First, when asking for tenders, it is important to allow the supplier the flexibility to achieve the effect required by different methods that may be more effective or better value for money. A good example is the anti-tank missile. In the summer, different companies proposed different methods of achieving the same result. Another example involves air mobility. I do not want to dwell on the future large aircraft today, although the Minister knows that I am a strong supporter of it both for industrial reasons—it is important to Airbus Industrie in my constituency—and for defence reasons. It is a good example of what I mean by setting the parameters by the results to be achieved. In this case, the result to be achieved is the movement of military personnel and hardware from one place to another by air. The FLA can carry more and bigger items much further than the Hercules airframe—whatever else may be done to it.

The Ministry of Defence needs to allow industry to consider the concept from start to finish, not just the individual parts, if it is to obtain the best results when letting contracts and inviting tenders. I recently had a brief conversation with my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement on the logistics aspect and was encouraged by his reply.

My other general point on defence procurement involves co-operation between our companies and overseas companies. As we have heard today, both the European and American defence industries are being radically reshaped in response to technology and the global challenges facing all industries. It is important to retain competition among suppliers, and it will undoubtedly become more difficult to do so globally, let alone within the United Kingdom. The Government should not attempt to set down a strategy for British industry, as the hon. Member for South Shields suggests.

Individual companies have to work it out for themselves, but the restructuring of the various individual industrial companies is mirrored by the Government's behaviour and by the collaborative purchases—as is shown in table 10 on pages 66 and 67 of the defence White Paper. It shows the procurement projects across the three services involving collaboration with other countries. Some 26 projects involve collaboration with France; 23 projects involve collaboration with Germany; 20 projects involve collaboration with the United States and 14 projects involve collaboration with Italy. The combinations are different; each project is different—which is as it should be—and a patchwork is produced. Hence the efforts, which I applaud, to try to co-ordinate the operational requirements more efficiently and more systematically. Co-ordination of the requirements—and hence the purchasing—obviously helps to secure value for money and is also in the interests of British, European and all industry.

The western European armaments group, operating under the Western European Union, does good work. In the White Paper and elsewhere, discussions are reported about a European armaments agency. Before anyone gets excited, that is not an initiative of the European Union or anything of the sort, and will not have the same membership. Key members would be the United Kingdom, France and Germany. On a transatlantic basis, there is the NATO conference of national armaments directors.

I hope that those initiatives are developing fast and that, tonight, we shall hear something about the progress that has been achieved in them and about what is expected for the future. Whatever we do, the defence business will continue to be multinational. Joint and parallel decision making by Governments and by armed forces—both ours and those of our allies—is therefore essential.

I add a postscript on a completely different subject. Tonight, we have heard little about the reserve forces. I recently visited one of our local Territorial Army units, as I do from time to time, and I was delighted to find that the new arrangements for it, and for the reserve forces generally, have been well received. The increased professionalism of, and the greater opportunities for, TA soldiers and the other reserves, are excellent.

When I was in the Territorial Army many years ago, its professionalism resulted from the fact that most of us had done national service—we had served in the forces full time. Although, when I was in the TA, continuing service was voluntary, doing a little of one's national service in the TA had been compulsory. That has been gone for a good while, which makes it much more difficult to sustain the professional quality of the reserves. I was therefore glad to find professionalism high, partly due to the Reserve Forces Act 1996—a piece of legislation that we considered recently and which is an important step forward.

6.1 pm

Dr. John Gilbert (Dudley, East): I start by referring to a couple of subjects that were mentioned earlier. My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) spoke forcefully and fluently; I was delighted to hear his speech. I dissented from him on only one minor point. He said—I hope that he will correct me if I do not quote him accurately—that Europe cannot afford to spend the same amount of its resources on defence as the United States does.

Dr. David Clark *rose—*

Dr. Gilbert: I should be grateful for clarification.

Dr. Clark: That was not the message which I tried to convey. I was arguing that many of our European allies do not spend as much as they should if they are serious about the defence of Europe and about playing a bigger part in NATO.

Dr. Gilbert: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I agree entirely. I also happen to think that this country does not spend enough on defence. We, as a European Union, have started bragging to the Americans that we have a larger gross domestic product than they do, yet we continue to rely on them to defend us. It is no surprise that the Americans get a bit shirty about that from time to time. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his clarification, and I

am confident that he will be diligent in persuading our European allies to live up to their responsibilities in those matters.

I intervened during the speech by the Secretary of State regarding the unilateral abandonment of this country's sub-strategic nuclear capability. I believe that I can say without danger of being corrected—I am sure that Ministers are listening, so let us see whether they trip me up—that only in the most recent defence White Paper was there any mention of Trident being used in a sub-strategic role. I should be grateful to hear from any Minister, or any hon. Member, of a scenario in which they envisage using Trident in a sub-strategic role.

What would have happened in the Gulf war, had Saddam Hussein decided to use chemical weapons, not against his people, but against the forces that were invading his country? Is it the Government's position that we would have responded with a Trident attack on the Republican guard or Iraqi front-line troops, or would we have sent a Trident into Baghdad or Basra? As soon as one considers those propositions, their ludicrousness and the disproportionality of any such deployments become immediately apparent.

This country has been, or is in the process of being, unilaterally denuded of any sub-strategic nuclear capability, and in Europe that capability will shortly repose solely in the hands of the French.

The main theme of my speech is NATO enlargement. It may come as a surprise to some of my friends in this place, among whom I may have a reputation for being a hawk, that I view NATO enlargement with considerable dismay and concern.

I hope that the Government will give an assurance that any discussions about NATO enlargement will take place country by country, and not by groups of countries; in other words, that there will be no suggestion that, for example, the Visegrad group of countries will be considered as a bloc for admission, but individual countries will have to meet the criteria of NATO membership before they are considered.

This question remains, however: should the geographic expansion go ahead if a decision is confirmed? Should it include Poland, Hungary, or the Czech Republic? Most people consider those to be likely candidates. What about Slovakia? Should NATO eventually include the Baltic states? Once one starts to consider the ramifications of one or two of those possibilities, which I shall discuss, the difficulties soon emerge.

One aspect that has not been considered is the enormous cost to the existing members of NATO of further expansion. If one expands NATO, by definition one expands the remit of article 5 of the North Atlantic treaty, and that article refers to common defence. Common defence means nothing without an infrastructure, and without reasonable commonality of weapon systems and, above all, of communications equipment. No one can seriously believe that Poland, the Czech Republic or Hungary—let alone the Baltic states—are in an economic condition to make anything like a proportional contribution to the costs of that extension of NATO's capability towards the east. It follows that those contributions will have to be made by the existing members of NATO, and from that it follows—

Mr. Donald Anderson: My right hon. Friend may be well aware that the United States Department of Defense commissioned a study from the Rand Corporation in relation to the most likely applicant countries—Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic—and that the study's conclusions, published this year, were surprisingly favourable. As I understand it, those countries are aware that there are costs and have said that they are prepared to pay those costs. Indeed, they query whether the Rand conclusions are inflated, because they are based on United States comparables rather than the actual costs in the Visegrad countries.

Dr. Gilbert: I am much obliged to my hon. Friend for reminding the House of that extremely interesting analysis, but I remain persuaded that the additional costs will have to be borne proportionally by the existing members of NATO and will have to be found from existing defence budgets.

I am also concerned about certain geostrategic considerations. The first is the reaction of the senior members of the armed forces in the former Soviet Union—the generals. We all know that generals do not necessarily dictate policy, but it was interesting to note that General Lebed recently came to Brussels and made some mild remarks about the possibility of NATO expanding towards the east; as soon as he got back to Moscow, however, he sang a very different tune.

In the former Soviet Union, the morale of the armed forces is very poor. In that I include the land forces, the tactical air forces and the surface fleet. By winning the cold war, we hoped to see the end of revanchist nationalist Governments in what was the Soviet Union. It would be a serious miscalculation on our part to provoke public opinion in that country by deploying NATO troops on the eastern borders of these candidate member countries. That would send all the wrong signals to Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus. It would give them the impression that we still regard them as possible enemies, at a time when we are trying to woo them into the comity of western civilisation and culture.

If we start increasing the size of NATO, moreover, we shall immediately dilute its decision-making power. It is difficult enough to get decisions taken within the 16 member countries; once NATO is enlarged to include the three or four most likely member states, the problems will be infinitely worse. After all, we are not talking about countries with similar value systems, such as Sweden or Finland; we are talking about countries that have had dictatorships for more than 50 years. It would therefore be very difficult to keep the decision-making process as satisfactory as it is at the moment.

NATO, with enlargement, would face additional costs, a dilution of its decision-making powers, and conversion from a successful defensive alliance to a generalised security arrangement.

It might be argued, alternatively, that we should offer these countries non-aggression treaties. That, too, would be extremely dangerous. NATO should not try to give security guarantees which it is in no position to honour. The Poles have still not forgiven the west, especially Britain and France, for the guarantee that we promised them, but never delivered, in 1939. They are still extremely bitter, and it would be absolutely wrong to offer that sort of guarantee again.

The idea that this House would approve putting the lives of British troops at risk—quite apart from the logistical problems—in order to protect Estonia's eastern border is pure moonshine.

[Dr. Gilbert]

We need to continue energetically to develop confidence-building measures with the Russians and to develop the "Partnership for Peace": not to try to expand NATO in an easterly direction.

Most Russians these days no longer see a threat from the west. They used to think there was one, just as we used to think that there was a threat from the east. Their view today is that the west is yesterday's problem, the south is today's problem and the east is tomorrow's problem—none of which makes it advisable to push NATO further east.

Some people opine that we must not allow the Russians, especially their generals, to dictate our policy. That is the language of the cold war. It is, rather, a question of deciding on the most sensible policies that will enable us to live in peace with the former members of the Warsaw pact.

Some say that it does not matter what the Russians think because they are now militarily incompetent. People draw attention to the performance of their land forces in Afghanistan and Chechnya. Morale is low and they have had virtually no new equipment for years. Before we become too self-satisfied, however, we ought to remember the state of the British Army of the Rhine at the time of the Gulf war, when we had to cannibalise just about every piece of kit that moved in order to make a modest but none the less worthwhile contribution. In terms of equipment and logistics, the Gulf war seriously stretched our capabilities. And in military terms, it was not a war but an incident.

We may be tempted to congratulate ourselves on the state of the Russian surface fleet, which is now virtually invisible. The Russians should be grateful for the fact that they have got rid of that incredibly expensive incubus, a burden laid upon them by Admiral Gorshkov. The Russian surface fleet was never relevant in any possible Warsaw pact-NATO conflict. I can remember how unhappy it used to make the navy department in the MOD, but the United States admiral who used to be in charge of Naples, C in C South, never worried when the Minsk and the Kiev were prancing around the western Mediterranean or coming around the north cape. What did worry him was when those ships returned to port. The admiral knew perfectly well that, in the event of a conflict, the Russians would never risk their high-value surface fleet units at sea. So we should be careful about congratulating ourselves on the loss of that Russian capability.

The Russian tactical air forces are still the beneficiaries of some excellent new aeroplanes, although I was recently told that their fast jet pilots get between 15 and 30 hours' flying time a year. It is clear that a modern tactical air force cannot be sustained in that way.

There are other areas, however, where the successor states of the Soviet Union retain a major capability—ballistic nuclear submarines and hunter-killer SSNs. In many ways, they are the equivalent of the most modern American submarines, and they are probably more capable than the most modern British ones in terms of how deep they can go, their modernised missiles and their silence. Those are not the only criteria, I am well aware, that establish a submarine's effectiveness. Computer software is also very important and the Americans are still well ahead in that sphere.

The fact remains that these forces are being well trained. They are rehearsing their role, their morale is good and, as far as I know, the officers and men are being paid regularly. The same is true of their land and air-based strategic nuclear forces, which are both getting new kit—land-based missile systems and sophisticated long-range bombers. Moreover, there must be at least a question mark over whether the Russians are trying to develop a biological warfare capability. I make no allegation that they are doing so, but I insist that we simply do not know. Not so long ago, when the Russian leadership was not telling us the truth about the Russians' capabilities, there were suspicions that they were.

Another subject on which I should be grateful for a response from the Minister, if not tonight, then by way of a letter when he returns to his office, is the development of non-lethal warfare techniques. I referred to the matter in the Chamber a couple of debates ago, but did not even get the courtesy of a note from the Ministry of Defence, which I thought was a bit poor, either saying that I had got it all wrong or at least giving me an anodyne response. The Americans take the matter seriously and have already had a Department of Defense directive on it. I believe that they have a current programme of investment of some $37 million or £25 million in a private scheme to study the matter and have tried out the weapons in areas such as Somalia. Some of the weapons are pretty diabolical because they end up blinding instead of killing men and women, but other techniques are worthy of study because they can immobilise both electronic and moving equipment, and aeroplanes.

One of the great advantages of non-lethal warfare techniques, other than minimising the risk to human life, is that they reduce the escalation of conflicts and create far less collateral and physical damage to the environment in which they are used. I am not yet convinced of their usefulness, but it would be valuable if the Ministry of Defence were to set up a study. Perhaps it has and I do not know about it, but I read nothing about such a study in this year's defence White Paper. I am prepared to be corrected if there is such a reference.

The Government would do a great service to the whole country if they were to set up a serious investigation into that matter. I hope that, whether they do so or not, my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields will give a commitment on behalf of the Labour party that, once we come to office, we shall give high priority to setting up a study into the possibilities of developing non-lethal methods of warfare.

6.22 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): It is always a pleasure to listen to the right hon. Member for Dudley, East (Dr. Gilbert) in a defence debate because he speaks with a wealth of experience. His remarks on the former Soviet Union and the expansion of NATO were extremely relevant to today's debate on the possibility of a Labour party strategic review, the Government's views, the intergovernmental conference and a common foreign security policy. I acknowledge what he says about the current state of the Russian army. An army that has not been paid for six months or, in some cases, a year, and where soldiers' families must become blood donors to find the money to live, shows that the position is serious and we should not ignore it.

Military interventions often take place not because of generals but because of the internal collapse of a country's economy. Argentina was standing by ready to invade someone; it did not care whether it was the Falklands or Chile. Eventually, the collapse of the Argentine economy led to an external adventure that cost us dear. So when the European Union develops plans for a common foreign and security policy, it must realise that the word "security" does not just mean defence; it means helping to develop the economies of those countries with which we may one day be at war if things go seriously wrong.

I endorse the opening remarks of the Front-Bench spokesmen on both sides, particularly their expressions of disgust at the breaking of the ceasefire by the IRA in Northern Ireland and their messages of sympathy to the family of Warrant Officer Bradwell, who sadly lost his life in the Lisburn bombing. I also endorse what was said about the performance of our forces serving in IFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I was fortunate enough to be in Bosnia during the recent elections and saw their work at first hand. I certainly endorse what has been said about our reserve forces. In all future operations, our reserve forces will clearly play an increasingly important role. I particularly applaud what our Royal Army Medical Corps territorials are doing to support our other forces in Bosnia.

I endorse what the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) said about the need for consensus in defence matters. The Defence Select Committee, which I currently have the honour to chair, has always succeeded in that respect. We never need to vote on matters. We always have full agreement on our reports, which is more than can be said for some Select Committees. It is often as well to leave a matter on the table and not reach a conclusion, as we did in the case of Gulf war syndrome and the married quarters proposals, with the reservation that we can always return to those matters at a later date once more information is at hand. I was sorry that the hon. Gentleman's call for consensus lasted for only the first third of his speech.

The hon. Member for South Shields said that we need to study again the requirement for air lift and sea lift with regard to overseas operations. When the Select Committee meets on Wednesday one of the proposals that I shall put forward is for an inquiry, in what remains of this Parliament—we shall not have a very long Session—on the question of generic heavy lift, because we must look at land, sea and air. We cannot mount overseas operations with a rapid reaction force when we must wait for Ukranian or United States ships to come and move our forces. So I agree with the hon. Gentleman on that.

Mr. Dalyell: May I ask the hon. Gentleman, as Chairman of the Select Committee, a factual question? At what stage were the concerns to which my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) referred, relating to Sergeant Anthony Worthington, environmental officer in the Gulf war, brought to the attention of the Select Committee when it discussed Gulf war syndrome?

Mr. Colvin: Without looking at the record, I cannot say. But I do not believe that that matter was brought to the Select Committee's attention. The Minister of State may have more to say on that matter when he winds up this evening, but I shall return to it later in my speech when I discuss Gulf war syndrome.

Mr. Dalyell: Without being partisan, as a long-standing member of the House of Commons I find it lazy and idle of the Ministry of Defence, when asked specific questions, not only in the House repeatedly by a range of Members from both sides but by the Select Committee, not to come up with that kind of information. It is an appalling treatment of Parliament, for which Ministers must be responsible.

Mr. Colvin: It is important to know what one is looking for. In the case of Gulf war syndrome, new evidence is coming to light all the time on both sides of the Atlantic. The Americans are having exactly the same difficulty as the Ministry of Defence. I shall return to the matter later in my speech and try to assist the hon. Gentleman.

As to the Labour party's offer of a strategic defence review, the hon. Member for South Shields revealed a clue about its proposals. I wrote down his words. In answering a question about defence cuts, he said that a Labour Government would spend whatever was necessary for the defence of Britain—I think that he used the word "Britain", which may be a subtle disguise for retrenchment from overseas. Lord Healey, as Secretary of State for Defence, was responsible for reducing Britain's overseas commitments. I hope that any future Government—of whatever political complexion—will continue to honour Britain's commitments regarding our worldwide investments and interests, including our commitments to our allies. My only other comment about the hon. Gentleman's speech is that he may come to regret his unfortunate remark that our armed forces are "under-performing".

The Defence Committee's report on the "Statement on the Defence Estimates" was published, as usual, shortly before the House rose for the summer recess—we must ensure that hon. Members have something constructive and interesting to read at the beach. The Committee's main conclusions were that our armed forces were managing to meet their commitments but that the strain shown by factors such as tour intervals, shortage of training and serviceability of equipment demonstrated that in an emergency they would be hard pressed to operate effectively at a higher level of activity or undertake any additional operational commitments.

The report reminded the House of the Committee's repeated warnings about overstretch in the Army since the "Options for Change" exercise. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said that, if many new demands arise, we will probably have to make some choices. His words may prove prophetic sooner than the Government expected, especially in light of the recent tragic resumption of violence in Northern Ireland.

Dr. David Clark: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy. I must correct him as he clearly misheard what I said. I said that the Conservatives' hands-off approach continued to fail Britain, with our defence industry under-performing. I hope that he accepts that that is what I said.

Mr. Colvin: I thank the hon. Gentleman for clarifying that point. We can read *Hansard* tomorrow to see precisely what was said.

I believe that the Committee was correct—I am sure that the House will endorse its view—to state that the United Kingdom must retain the capability to mount high

[Mr. Colvin]

intensity conflict at strategic, tactical and operational levels anywhere in the world while maintaining the quality of life of our service men and women. The Committee fired a shot over the Secretary of State's bow in its conclusion—it is already on record because the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for South Shields, mentioned it during his speech, but I shall explain the details.

The SDE 1995 contained plans for defence spending of £66 billion in the three years to 1997-98. However, buried in the Budget details we found cuts of £900 million over three years. Those cuts were partly disguised by a promise to carry over some of the underspending of previous years. However, the Committee's report shows that the net effect would be a reduction in defence spending of £686 million in real terms over three years.

As many hon. Members have said, the 1995 SDE offered stability following the adjustments required by the ending of the cold war. Further cuts in defence spending in this year's Budget would deny our armed forces that stability and would not be acceptable to anyone. I trust that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has succeeded in fighting his corner against the annual Treasury onslaught. In case he has not, I must inform him that the Committee plans to hold a meeting the morning after the Budget statement at which he may explain the Budget's impact on the nation's defences. I hope that it will not be necessary to convene that meeting, but I agree with other hon. Members that even a nod and a wink from the Front Bench today would be welcome. Perhaps the Minister will reassure us in his wind-up speech that the "Statement on the Defence Estimates" that we are agreeing today will remain in force after the Budget.

Although our armed forces do their best to perform whatever tasks are given to them, there are obvious examples of strain. Two thirds of Army units deployed in 1995-96 did so within 24 months of a previous tour, which is a breach of the tour interval target. The MOD expects average tour intervals to deteriorate further this year, with the average for the infantry falling to 20 months. That is bad for morale, it affects families and is therefore bad for recruiting—it is little wonder that the infantry is short of soldiers.

Reduced expenditure on spares has contributed to the decline in the serviceability of RAF fighter aircraft. The recent Army exercise in Poland was the first full brigade size field training exercise for five years. The two new amphibious ships have been delayed by 17 months due to what is described as "budgetary constraints", while £40 million has been spent to keep HMS Fearless operational. There are many other examples of urgent equipment orders being pushed to the right, as they say, in order to comply with the Treasury's insistence upon cuts.

The published version of the "Major Projects Report" for 1995 gives more details. The batch 2 Trafalgar class nuclear-powered submarines are 28 months late. The Bowman combat radio system, which will replace the Clansman, has also been delayed by 28 months. The BR90, which is the Bridging for the 90s project, is six months late on each of four projects. In 1995, the Trigat anti-tank weapon was delayed by 24 months, making a total delay of 60 months. The Rapier field standard C has been delayed by 12 months.

Mr. Miller: In challenging the Minister to make a statement to the Committee the day after the Budget, does the hon. Gentleman believe that the batch 2 Trafalgar class submarines will not go ahead? Is he satisfied that the project will go ahead?

Mr. Colvin: I am as satisfied as I can be. However, I am concerned about its timing. Many orders have been placed which, thanks to Treasury constraints, have been edged to the right. If a wife wants a new kitchen, her husband might say, "Yes, darling, of course you can have it." However, if there is not enough money, he could delay, perhaps by saying, "I couldn't get the one you wanted," or, "The colour scheme is wrong." It could be pushed into next year's household budget: we all know that it can be done.

Mrs. Dunwoody: There would be trouble in the marriage.

Mr. Colvin: I take the point. Such delays deprive our armed forces of much-needed equipment and add to industry costs. Although it may help the Treasury to balance the books this year, it will add to the long-term costs.

While on the subject of defence industries, I draw the attention of the House to the equipment section in the Committee's report. During our visit to Washington last June, we studied the state of the so-called "two-way street" regarding reciprocal sales and purchases of defence equipment between the United Kingdom and the United States, particularly the extent to which United Kingdom companies get offset defence business from US companies when our Government buy American. The two-way street when the Government came to power was about 15:1 in favour of the United States. During 17 years of Conservative Government, that ratio has improved, but it is still 2:1 in favour of the United States and that is too much.

Since the end of the cold war, there has been an enormous restructuring of defence industries on both sides of the Atlantic. That restructuring has hit the United States defence industrial base much harder than it has hit ours, because we were restructuring anyway. There has been a dramatic loss of jobs in the United States.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) earlier referred to the question of diversification and conversion in the defence industries and he picked up a point made in the Opposition amendment. The United States of America has thrown $300 million at the conversion of its defence industries with not a single dollar in return. It has been a complete waste of money and is not the way to use public funds.

Another factor is the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Russians' desperate need for foreign currency. They are flooding world markets with defence hardware, including Kilo class submarines and even Scud missiles. That is dangerous and it is also bad for our overseas sales prospects.

While in Washington, we met Dr Paul Keminski, who is the Department of Defense Under-Secretary for Acquisition and Technology. We had an interesting

discussion and Dr Keminski gave every indication that the United States is beginning to have a change of heart about what is known as the "buy American" policy. He saw the advantages of an open market for defence products. He told us of 20 equipment programmes that offered opportunities for co-operation with the United Kingdom and he held out exciting prospects for research and development programmes.

Dr Keminski also told us that because of the shrinkage of the US defence industrial base, it was difficult to obtain competitive quotations within the United States and his Department had to look to Europe, and in particular the United Kingdom, for competition. He wanted the business to start further upstream—in other words, research and development programmes would be open to United Kingdom bids as well as to American companies. The Americans intend to spend $45 million in 1997 on 34 such projects, and Britain is already involved in a third of them. It is therefore doubly important that the Ministry of Defence should react positively to the call from the Society of British Aerospace Companies for Government help with demonstration programmes, because otherwise we run the risk of losing our technological lead.

One big question is whether the United States and the United Kingdom are becoming more protectionist. Both countries are in an election mode and there is a tendency for orders to be placed at home. We see that in the United States at the moment. We have heard calls from Congressmen on the hustings for an expansion of the "buy American" policy. In the UK, we want to see a better balance of transatlantic trade in defence hardware and the Government's decisions on the Nimrod replacement and the stand-off missile and anti-armour weapon for the RAF are welcome examples of that.

The key to the Nimrod replacement is the opening up of world markets, because there is a market of some £9 billion waiting for a replacement maritime patrol aircraft. Japan, for example, wants a jet maritime patrol aircraft that can fly higher, is pressurised and has a longer range, and the co-operation between British Aerospace, Boeing and McDonnell Douglas may assist our access to that market. This product has tremendous prospects.

If I may wear for a moment my constituency hat rather than my Select Committee hat, I wish to seek support for the United Kingdom's two leading military communications companies, Siemens Plessey Systems and Racal Radio—both of which have facilities in my constituency—in their bid for the MOD's Bowman contract to succeed the Clansman communication system. Their bid meets all the MOD's requirements and the companies have already spent enormous sums of their own money on the development of the project. The companies are British and they would create some 6,500 new jobs if they won the contract. The tremendous export potential would mean still more jobs.

Earlier, the subject of Gulf war syndrome was mentioned. We have heard much about organophosphate pesticides in recent years, but not usually in defence debates. They are now on the agenda. Ten days ago, my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces revealed that those pesticides were used more widely in the Gulf than was previously thought and he corrected evidence that had previously been given—not by him, but by an official—to the Defence Committee. That is an example of open government, because there was no pressure on my hon. Friend and he voluntarily came forward with the information. The Select Committee was pleased to have it although we want to know why it has taken so long for the Ministry of Defence to review the records of all the environmental and operational conditions to which British forces were exposed in the Gulf. We will consider any new evidence and I welcome the offer from my hon. Friend the Minister to meet the Select Committee with his officials to review the welcome and major research programme that will be undertaken into Gulf war syndrome. In particular, we wish to know more details about the epidemiological survey and the Medical Research Council's intentions.

Since the House last sat, the Ministry of Defence has also announced the successful bidder for the married quarters estate—the consortium led by Annington, which has some distinguished military figures on the board. Annington's expertise as a property management company will be more important than the nationality of the various financial institutions that have put up the money. The Select Committee produced an interim report in July and we will consider the details of the sale. Service families will welcome the deletion from the scheme, for the first 25 years at least, of the site exchange option, because it had caused considerable uncertainty.

The sale has not been a tremendous public relations achievement for the Ministry of Defence and, combined with the rise in rents, it has made service families very unhappy. The onus is now on the Ministry of Defence, the Defence Housing Executive and Annington to demonstrate the benefits of the new arrangements, not least the upgrading of the existing service accommodation and the preservation of the integrity of the "patch".

Before I conclude, I will say something about the future of NATO and may take up what the hon. Member for South Shields said, but first I wish to mention one other procurement matter. The Warrior has given stalwart service in Bosnia and it has been the envy of all our allies, which demonstrates the enormous export potential for that vehicle. GKN needs an interim order to maintain the skill base at Telford, where the Warrior is manufactured. The company has made an imaginative proposal for the supply of Warriors in the mortar vehicle role to replace the old, slow F-432s. The mortar proposal is based on the private finance initiative and no payments would need to be made until 2000. That should please the Treasury. It is vital that the production line of the much respected Warrior is maintained. It is the flagship product of GKN Defence and I hope that the proposal wins favourable consideration from the MOD.

When my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement winds up, I hope that he can tell me whether he has had any further thoughts about the decommissioning of our nuclear submarines. At the moment, the plan is to leave them alongside at Rosyth for the half-life to take effect and to remove the radioactivity in due course, but other nuclear reactors exist. For example, questions have been raised about a small reactor used for training purposes at Greenwich and I would like to know my hon. Friend's thoughts on the decommissioning of that facility.

In conclusion, I shall consider the question of NATO and European security. NATO has now become, de facto, the enforcement arm of the United Nations, but—as we have seen with IFOR—our forces and those of our allies are far more effective when they can operate without the encumbrance of the dual key that was one of the

[Mr. Colvin]

disadvantages of UNPROFOR. It is interesting that many of the forces now deployed in former Yugoslavia are from non-NATO and even ex-Warsaw treaty states, which are all doing their best to prove their worthiness with a view to joining NATO. There is no doubt that there are countries in central and eastern Europe that feel isolated and in a security vacuum. NATO membership remains a principal objective for them. It is important that NATO extends its horizons beyond the strict terms of the Washington treaty. The principal question is not whether NATO wants to expand but the manner and pace in which it does so. To embrace those suitably qualified European countries that want to join the organisation is both necessary and desirable. In the long run their membership will enhance European security. The alternative of leaving a security vacuum in central and eastern Europe is unacceptable.

I doubt whether any of the potential new members could bring positive military benefits to NATO. NATO membership must mean full membership.

Dr. Gilbert: The question is whether we are expanding NATO to enhance our security or to enhance the security of the new candidate member states. The countries that are the most qualified are those that least need their security enhanced, whereas the countries that most need their security to be enhanced, such as the Baltic states, are those that are least qualified. Estonia, for example, has a terrible problem. It has a population of 1.5 million, no means of self-defence and 600,000 Russians.

Mr. Colvin: The right hon. Gentleman's point is valid. What he says proves that there should be no associate membership, no half membership and no semi-alliance status. A new member country will enjoy the rights and privileges of membership of the alliance and must share to the full its political and military obligations, including the mutual security obligation—the so-called article 5 guarantee of the Washington treaty.

There are 65 NATO headquarters around the world. There has been some discussion about restructuring and a reorganisation. The NATO Secretary-General, Mr. Solano, has recently been floating the idea of reorganising NATO's structures in the western Europe, Mediterranean and Iberian Atlantic area, as part of moves, perhaps, to bring Spain and France within NATO's integrated military structure. His suggestion that NATO might close down GibMed and the command centre on the rock of Gibraltar as a precondition for Spain joining the integrated military structure of NATO is, I believe, both premature and probably wrong.

When the Select Committee was examining the southern flank of NATO we, its members, visited both GibMed to see the facility within the Rock and NATO IBERLANT in Portugal. We were more impressed with the Gibraltar facility than with IBERLANT, where soon after our arrival the lights fused and the entire command system went down.

If there is to be any reorganisation, the command centre at Gibraltar should be retained and not the other one, even if that means that Spanish service personnel might one day be helping to man the command centre within the Rock. The long-term benefits to Gibraltar as a NATO base would be significant. There would be the opening of the frontiers on a permanent basis, and there would be no more obstruction by the Spanish authorities. That would be very much in Gibraltar's favour.

As I have said, the members of the Select Committee visited Gibraltar as part of their southern flank study. The possibility of threats from north Africa must be reassessed before we start changing the existence of NATO structures within the region. There seems to be a crescent of crisis stretching all the way from Afghanistan to the western Sahara, with trouble all the way. There is a proliferation of arms along with a growth of fundamentalist tendencies and the collapse of some economies. There is trouble there which NATO will have to address. The security of the Mediterranean is becoming much more important. As the Russians find oil in the Caucasus the route for it will be out through the Mediterranean at the Straits of Gibraltar. That stresses again the importance of Gibraltar.

The problem that I have outlined calls for an extension of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe to cover north Africa so that we might try to help the economies of countries in that area and thus prevent from arising the circumstances that could trigger the military adventures to which I have referred. If the OSCE, which has 53 members already, is too cumbersome for that purpose, perhaps a southern partnership for peace, as suggested by the North Atlantic Assembly, could be set up.

Whatever is decided, Britain will continue to play its part. British forces will demonstrate their quality, as they are doing now while deployed on active service in 33 countries worldwide. I welcome the opportunity to pay them credit for a job well done. I trust that the resources that are being promised to them in this year's estimates will not be plundered, as they were last year, by the Treasury.

6.55 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North–East): I welcome the opportunity to associate myself with the remarks of the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), who is the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, of which I am a member. He presides over our proceedings with great elegance and considerable ability. However, his domestic analogy in relation to the postponement of procurement projects, which he likened to persuading one's wife that she should not have a new kitchen, found him treading on dangerous ground. I have met Mrs. Colvin and I would not like to be the man who stood in the way of her new kitchen. I suspect that the truth is that the hon. Gentleman does not stand very much in the way of anything that Mrs. Colvin wishes to do.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: No. The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside was on dangerous ground and I am on even more dangerous ground. It is time to move on.

We pay tribute in this debate every year to the armed services wherever they are called upon to serve. Over the years, as the tension ebbs and flows in Ulster, it has been obvious to us all that the lives of men and women serving on our behalf there are more or less at risk. Last week, at

Lisburn, once again there was injury and death. As has already been said, a brave man, Warrant Officer Bradwell, died in the course of serving his country.

We have an obligation to protect such men and women to the utmost of our ability. In the aftermath of the events at Lisburn, we must ask ourselves whether we are satisfied that, in that case, we did. It is extremely serious that terrorists were able to penetrate the security of the Army's headquarters in Northern Ireland.

I was glad to hear the Secretary of State say that there are Army and Royal Ulster Constabulary investigations. It will be in the nature of those investigations that hon. Members will not be entitled to know all that is discovered. Nothing would be more foolish in an investigation of security to make all the elements of the investigations public. I hope, however, that in due course the House will receive an assurance from the Secretary of State, or the appropriate Minister, that a full and comprehensive inquiry has been carried out. I hope also that if there are lessons to be learnt from that inquiry, those lessons will be learnt and that all the necessary steps will be taken.

Mr. Mans: I am certain that the hon. and learned Gentleman agrees that a full inquiry should take place. Does he agree also that it was entirely inappropriate for Channel 4 News, when it reported the incident a day or two ago, to show on screen a complete plan of the barracks at Lisburn, and sensitive buildings in it, so anyone might know exactly what existed there and where to go?

Mr. Campbell: Anything that reduces the security of those who continue to serve on our behalf in Northern Ireland is to be deprecated. It was an editorial judgment which I certainly would not have made.

Towards the end of his speech, the Secretary of State reminded us, correctly, that in Bosnia NATO had not been seriously tested. In the Gulf war, to which the right hon. Gentleman also alluded, we were not seriously tested either. It is important to realise that the capacity to continue to fight a high-intensity conflict depends on adequate numbers of men and items of equipment and clear political objectives. One of the reasons why we have been successful in Bosnia is the number of men and the quantity of equipment available and the clarity of the political objectives—in sharp contrast to those of the previous four years under the aegis of the United Nations Protection Force.

It is important to realise that, if we maintain our high-intensity warfare capability, modifying our troops and our approach to peacekeeping or peacemaking may not be easy, but such changes can be made. If, on the other hand, we maintain our forces and equipment at the peacemaking and peacekeeping level, it is impossible to move from that to the level of high-intensity warfare.

It is the proud boast of Canada that its troops have participated in every United Nations peacekeeping operation since they began. However, as a consequence of that wholly laudable commitment, the configuration of Canada's armed forces has been geared to peacekeeping and peacemaking, so that its capacity to fight high-intensity warfare has been substantially eroded.

It is no secret that I, along with some of my hon. Friends, believe in far greater integration with our European partners in defence matters. Nothing that has happened in the past year—since we last debated these matters—has persuaded me otherwise. I say again, as I said then, that these issues will be driven by economics rather than by institutions. Against the background of reducing defence budgets in Europe, we shall be able to maintain a range and depth of capability only by greater co-operation. It has at last been recognised that the European defence industry must be much more cohesive so that it can compete sensibly with the much larger and more powerful defence industry of the United States.

Common procurement and force specialisation will, of necessity, be the way ahead for European defence. We already have common procurement in the Eurofighter—to which I shall return in a moment—and in the common new generation frigate. Operational co-operation already takes place: the Franco-British air group, Franco-British nuclear co-operation—which, I am led to believe, takes place at a higher and more detailed level than is publicly known—the recently formed Dutch-Belgian joint naval command, the new Franco-Belgian naval accord, the Eurocorps and the Anglo-Dutch amphibious force are the components of organic policy development.

Let us be clear and lay a myth. No country will give up the right to determine when and where its troops will fight. That is a responsibility that national Governments and national Parliaments can never vacate, nor should they. Imagine France, with its proud military history, agreeing that a determination as to how and when French troops should fight should be made elsewhere. Imagine Germany, cautiously emerging from the constitutional presumption against its forces operating outside its boundaries, agreeing that such decisions should be made elsewhere.

Will the European security and defence identity develop further? Of course it will, and for the reasons that I have already given. On these occasions, I am always reminded of the remarks made in May 1994 by the Foreign Secretary who, as Secretary of State for Defence, was quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* as saying that the evolution of an EC defence policy was an inevitable consequence of Maastricht. Later that year, the former Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), spoke to the Franco-British Council and called for practical co-operation in European defence

"putting our military assets . . . at the service of European defence".

Since those days, the emphasis of the Government's language has changed from time to time, no more so than when they are under the influence of the sea breezes of seaside conference towns. The march of events and the pressure of economics remain inexorable. In my judgment, the development of a European defence policy is an inevitable consequence with which we shall all have to learn to live, however enthusiastic or unenthusiastic we may be about the concept.

During the summer, the Prime Minister told us that we had a moral duty not to take too much of citizens' resources by way of unnecessary taxation. This is an interesting philosophical issue. Does that moral duty create a higher obligation than the obligation to provide for the aged, the sick and the poor?

I have a moral question for the Prime Minister. Why does this country continue to permit arms exports to Indonesia? Hawk jets, Scorpion tanks and water cannon are already exported, and further exports are being

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contemplated. There is evidence that the water cannon have been used in Jakarta against pro-democracy demonstrators.

Once such equipment leaves the United Kingdom, we have no control over its use, no matter what undertakings have been given. Are we prepared to accept the word of an Administration who say that they will not use equipment for a particular purpose, when at the same time they are engaged in the brutal suppression of the civil rights of the people of East Timor? I feel that, given Indonesia's ever worsening record on human rights, it is wrong for the United Kingdom to continue those exports. I say that as one who has supported British Aerospace, both on the Eurofighter and, more recently, by my robust opposition—along with other hon. Members, some of whom are in the Chamber—to the suggestion that we should lease in F16 aircraft rather than embark on the mid-life update of the Tornado. I will take no lessons from anyone about the need to assist British Aerospace, but I do not believe that the future of that company depends on, or should depend on, the export of Hawk aircraft to Indonesia.

If the debate has underlined anything, it has underlined the need for a general election. On the Conservative side of the House there is complacency, while on this side—perhaps the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) will not be cheering quite so much in a moment—there is caution. If we are to have a fundamental, full-scale strategic defence review, we must accept in advance that if it throws up circumstances in which an increase in expenditure is required, we must be prepared to make that increase and spend the money. That is the part of the jigsaw constructed by the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) which has never been entirely clear.

If I have another criticism of the debate, it is the remarkable absence of any long-term thinking—perhaps that is due to the closeness of the general election. During the summer, the Canberra commission on the elimination of nuclear weapons published its report. Hon. Members may not agree with everything in that report, but it represents a detailed analysis of the steps that could be taken to achieve multilateral nuclear disarmament. No one has so far seen fit to refer to that.

We are left with the conclusion that the Government tend to stagger from one public expenditure settlement to another. It is true that announcements were made in the summer about the replacement of the maritime control aircraft, which I support, the conventionally armed stand-off missile and the anti-armour missile. I seek the assistance of the Minister of State for Defence Procurement on a technical point. As I understand it, the anti-armour weapon on the Apache is the Hellfire, whereas for fixed-wing Royal Air Force aircraft it is to be Brimstone. Have we lost something by not using the same anti-armour weapon both for rotary wing and for fixed wing? If not in this debate, perhaps the Minister might advise me by letter whether there is anything in what I just said.

We also know that the operational effectiveness of the armed services has been inhibited by a shortage of spares, reduced opportunities for training and a lack of manpower. For example, for the Royal Air Force, expenditure on Tornado spares has fallen by one third, resulting in the cannibalisation of aircraft. In December 1995, six out of 36 aircraft at Brüggen were serviceable.

I understand from the announcement in the White Paper that we are coming home from Germany. When I suggested that last year, Ministers dismissed it. Now it is Government policy. It makes good financial sense.

On spares, I sometimes feel that we have not learnt the lesson of the Gulf war, to which the right hon. Member for Dudley, East (Dr. Gilbert) referred. It took three armoured divisions in Germany to produce one that was capable of going to war in the Gulf. We should have taken that serious lesson into account. After "Options for Change", so considerable has been the draw-down in forces that there is no reservoir from which to draw. In relation to spares, I believe that our situation is dangerously fragile.

On recruitment, the Army is only now recovering from the mistakes that were made during "Options for Change". Manpower shortage inevitably exacerbates overstretch. In the spring of 1996, 25 per cent. of the Army were deployed, while 11 per cent. were either preparing for, or were on leave after, operations.

I was glad to hear the Secretary of State confirm that if there is a military follow-on force in Bosnia—a follow-on force to IFOR—the United Kingdom will be part of it. I think that today is the first time that that commitment has been made publicly. There was, however, one caveat. He said, in response to my intervention, that a United States presence was also necessary. He did not specify whether he meant a United States presence on the ground or a United States presence by offering or contributing assets of another kind.

I am in no doubt that IFOR's effectiveness has been as a result of the United States' presence on the ground. It seems to me that if we are to have an effective and successful follow-on force under the aegis of NATO, a component from the United States on the ground will be fundamental. We must not have a return to the morass, over which UNPROFOR was obliged to preside, of ambiguous objectives and inadequate resources.

On the Navy, only reduced deployments in the Adriatic have allowed the achievement of the guidelines that apply to time spent in home port.

One had a sense that there was a touch of Dr. Pangloss in the Secretary of State's speech—all is for the best in the best of possible worlds. I hope that he will not regard it as overly personal if I say that, outside the ranks of the adoring blue-rinsed matrons in the Bournemouth conference hall, not many people believe that; certainly not the Defence Committee, which was unanimous in its conclusion that no more reductions in expenditure are tolerable. One might put the question slightly differently and say: if further cuts in expenditure are to be effected, tell us which commitments are to be abandoned.

The emergence of the use—much more widely than was appreciated—of organophosphates in the Gulf has been mentioned. It is fair to say that Ministers have not been slow to criticise their critics on this topic, but I believe that the House will be united in a desire to ensure that we do the best for the veterans of the Gulf conflict, and that we do the best that we can to ensure the fullest investigation of the contribution, if any, that the extended use of organophosphates has made to the condition of those who now claim to be suffering from Gulf war syndrome.

I have a number of questions that I wish to put to the Government. They are not for answer today, but they should lie at the very heart of the investigation and, in due course, the information should be given to the House. The first question is simple: who gave the instruction to use organophosphates? At what rank was the decision made? Were civilian employees of the Ministry of Defence aware that organophosphates were being used? If so, at what level within the Department? Were detailed instructions issued to minimise contact with service men and women? What investigation was carried out to determine whether it was safe to use organophosphates in the amounts in which they appear to have been used?

Was the MOD aware of the contents of the Health and Safety Executive's written guidance of 1987, which clearly identifies the risks attached to the use of organophosphates? I am no clinician, but are not the symptoms of organophosphate poisoning, as set out in that written guidance, remarkably similar to the complaints of those who now claim to be suffering from Gulf war syndrome? Why has this information emerged only now? Will the Government publish all the documents that contain information relevant to the use of organophosphates in the Gulf?

Finally, can we now be satisfied that we have all the information? As I have reasonably been prompted from the Labour Front Bench, what did the Government know and when did they know it? That is the crucial question, which, at least in Mr. Richard Nixon's case, proved very difficult to answer.

Mr. Corbyn: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way. I did not want to interrupt the flow of his argument. Is he aware that there is an historical parallel to this, which is as unpleasant as it is apposite? Work by the national poisons laboratory in this country revealed that, around 1987, organophosphates were used as a poison against Kurds in Iraq by the Saddam regime? It was commonly known at that time just how dangerous they were, and on that occasion they were put into the bread of very hungry people who then unwittingly ate them and subsequently died.

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman has the advantage in that that information serves to underline the fact that the use—or abuse—should, in an ideal world, have given rise to very considerable apprehension.

Mr. Dalyell: May I add to the hon. and learned Gentleman's very pertinent list of questions just one more? What use was the information that the Department now has put to in August and September of this year when preparations were being made for—heaven help us—further action in the Gulf? British troops were being prepared for possible further action during the summer recess. Were they in any way the beneficiary of the information and experience that the Government should have brought to the House?

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman's question stands on its own merits. I do not need to add to it.

There is now no immediate procurement project more important and significant than Eurofighter 2000. It is important for the Royal Air Force, British Aerospace and, indeed, Europe. It is important for the RAF because that force requires an agile fighter, and Eurofighter was designed to the highest standards to meet that requirement. It is important for BAe because that company requires to work and to produce at the cutting edge of the most modern technology. Its future and that of the British aircraft industry depends not entirely on the success of the Eurofighter programme, but in substantial part. It is important for Europe because Europe requires a successful joint procurement programme that involves European industry. That is clear beyond any question—the preliminary skirmishes between the European defence industrial base and that of the United States give a clear foretaste of the industrial battle that is undoubtedly to come.

The failure of the Eurofighter project would damage all three of the interests that I have identified and make even more difficult the path towards the future offensive aircraft. A collaborative programme in Europe would be much more difficult to mount successfully against the failure of Eurofighter. The question that must be asked is: if Germany withdraws from the programme will the United Kingdom proceed with that programme in concert with the other partners?

I have already bemoaned what I have described as a lack of long-term thinking. The issue of multilateral nuclear disarmament should be addressed by the House and the Government. We have successfully concluded a non-proliferation treaty and, although it is not in the form that everyone would have preferred, the comprehensive test ban treaty has attracted more than 100 signatories and supporters.

Another long-term issue that we should consider is ballistic missile defence for the United Kingdom, because a proliferation of missiles is being sold by manufacturing countries which are insufficiently fastidious about their customers. The House—certainly the Government—should bear such long-term considerations in mind.

At the beginning of my speech, I said that it was customary to praise the men and women who serve in our three armed services. That is more than a ritual, more even than a convention. During this Parliament, they have served in Bosnia, Northern Ireland and many other theatres, and their loyalty and professionalism are a lesson to us all. They give of their best and, sometimes, as we saw last week, they have to give of their lives. They deserve the very best that we can give them.

7.20 pm

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): It is an honour and a privilege to follow the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell). In particular, I agree with what he said about those who serve in Northern Ireland because my brother is currently serving there. I congratulate him on his remarks about the rather extraordinary speech by the Opposition defence spokesman, the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) about a comprehensive, strategic defence review. The hon. Gentleman would say neither what would be in it nor what would be out of it and spoke about commitments without saying what they would be. He totally failed to persuade us that any defence review that has ever taken place has done anything other than cut defence expenditure, often without sufficiently reducing the commitments that went with the cuts or detailing the commitments.

[Mr. Andrew Hargreaves]

Recently, we have heard much from Labour about the priority of education. As the father of two sons of nine and 11, I am passionately concerned about that area of our responsibility. In the 1920s and 1930s, both Austria and Czechoslovakia had enviably well-educated societies, as did part of Belgium. If we do not have the will to find the funds for strong defences, we shall end up as the world's best-educated slaves. History teaches us that it is never safe to relax our guard. A nation that does not have the will to provide for its defence is no longer a nation but a collection of communities. A nation that spends much more on social security than on national security has lost its will to survive or to influence for the better the world around it or the lives of those who live within it. One could look at modern Belgium and, soon, Holland to illustrate the point.

This year, we shall spend 13.4 per cent. of our gross domestic product, or more than £90 billion, on social security as against 3 per cent. of our GDP on defence. That is a decline from 4.5 per cent. of GDP in 1979. It is relentless year by year and there is a further 0.3 per cent. cut this year—and that from a Conservative Government who are committed to defence. I say that not to make a party political point, although I may make some later, but because I know that some Opposition Members, of whom the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East is one, are desperately concerned and committed to defence and to the services. Should another party come to power, it might find even greater difficulty than Conservative Back Benchers encounter in trying to keep the Treasury's hands off the defence budget.

The world is more dangerous today than it was during the cold war. If anything, our forces are more likely to be called upon to protect British lives or interests and to place themselves in harm's way than during the period of the cold war. Although the danger of an all-out nuclear war has receded with the changes in eastern Europe, the escalation of nuclear proliferation—the sale of highly advanced weaponry to highly unstable militaries, let alone third-world countries—means that almost any conflict is capable of becoming high intensity, if not nuclear, at very short notice. The Gulf war demonstrated that but luckily it did not result in great damage to our forces.

To the bleeding hearts brigade in the Opposition who hanker for defence cuts on the one hand and for our troops to be sent to prevent massacres, ethnic cleansing or civil wars in a League of Nations dream world on the other, I say that that is hypocritical and morally indefensible. The call is to, "Send your own family but do not send mine, ill-equipped and overstretched, into those situations." That is what our troops would be. To the Chancellor and those Treasury civil servants who are cynical about defence expenditure I simply say that if they fail to provide the money now for military deterrence—as the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East has said, that must include money for a joint anti-ballistic missile defence system—when the first new generation Scud that is fired, or even threatened to be fired, from a container ship in the Mediterranean or from the Atlantic approaches, it will be not just their families that they have endangered nor they who will curse them.

Those threats are real and we must find the money to protect our country and our forces from them. The Prime Minister has promised a period of stability for our armed services and, therefore, for the defence budget. I urge the Government and the Secretary of State for Defence in particular to ensure that neither the Chancellor, or the Treasury, nor anyone else undermines the Prime Minister's commitment.

We face an exceptionally unstable period made worse by the seemingly inevitable instability that is caused by the failure of the European Union to adjust its institutions, ambitions and strategies to take account of the accession of the Warsaw pact countries and the reunification of Germany—a country that is now the size of France and west Germany combined. It is not for nothing that the Russian tone has changed and that General Lebed now refers to the new German fourth reich.

I congratulate the Secretary of State and his Department on the highly successful bilateral exchanges and visits between Russian and British officers and other personnel which have taken place since the last debate on the defence estimates. I urge him to do all that he can to continue to expand those bilaterally and within the "Partnership for Peace" or the North Atlantic Council frameworks, especially in view of the pressure in some quarters for the expansion of NATO. His Department's success in developing training exercises in Poland and, hopefully, soon in Ukraine is greatly to be applauded and one might dare to hope that if those in Ukraine succeed and are repeated, perhaps joint disaster relief, peacekeeping and even counter-terrorist training may ultimately be possible in Russia, too.

The Secretary of State and his team must also be congratulated on their success in resisting the Treasury's insidious attempts to undermine the Prime Minister's undertaking and that of the Secretary of State's predecessor by delaying or indefinitely postponing the announcement of any of the three major equipment orders that he announced at the end of July just before the House rose. They were the orders for 21 maritime patrol aircraft with Nimrod, costing some £2 billion, to British Aerospace; for the conventionally armed stand-off missile—CASOM—with Storm Shadow to British Aerospace Matra, which is a welcome order in terms of Anglo-French armaments co-operation; and for the advanced air-launched anti-armour weapon with Brimstone to GEC-Marconi.

The value of those orders to the respective services, to the proper equipping of our forces and to employment in the defence industry is even greater than the substantial figure of some £4 billion involved. Of course I am delighted that Lucas Aerospace in my constituency will benefit from some of those orders. It would be remiss of me not to mention again—as our previous debate on the defence estimates preceded the decision—my gratitude to Ministers for selecting Land Rover for the Army ambulance and TUL-TUM—utility truck—orders at the beginning of the year.

Friends in the Royal Navy will welcome the further batch of three type 23 frigates, but would no doubt give it a warmer welcome if Ministers could speed up the resolution of the problems with the battlefield communications software on those ships so that they can play their full part and exploit their potential. Doing that would relieve the pressure on other ships. Everyone in the Royal Navy, and no doubt everyone in the Marines, will welcome at last the finalisation of the order for Albion and Bulwark, the replacements for Fearless and Intrepid. Linked with the order for HMS Ocean, that at last puts

flesh on the bones of a strategic emphasis on flexible intervention and interdiction forces. With the acquisition of ro-ro ferries, the amphibious role has been enhanced.

The only minor cloud on the increasingly sunny picture is my concern that, following the withdrawal from service of HMS Polaris, or the last Polaris submarine—I can never remember which it is—our nuclear deterrent is now based, if only temporarily, on the two new Trident submarines alone. I assume that that means that they will be constantly deployed—with all the resultant strain—but that the decision was taken on the basis that that could be done without harming the effectiveness of our deterrent because the boats were so new and so early in their service life. However, it poses some awkward questions on which I would be grateful for a comment from my hon. Friend the Minister the Minister of State for Defence Procurement in his winding-up speech.

Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us that he has a greater than usual number of conventionally armed SSNs available on deployment in the period before the two further Tridents come into service, or that he will be exploiting the flexibility of the submarine-launched cruise missiles. Better still, he might say that he has brought forward the order for the further five batch 2 Trafalgar boats. I hope that my hon. Friend will allay my concerns, if not during the debate, then by other means. My right hon. and hon. Friends have made a good start on the pledge made at the time of both "Options for Change" and the defence cost studies that our forces would be leaner but better equipped. They deserve to be congratulated on that.

All hon. Members interested in defence pay close attention to equipment orders because of their value not only to the services but to jobs in their constituencies. The aerospace sector alone employs some 134,500 people, and the defence industry, and its value in terms of jobs and exports, is a national asset. Such an asset would be threatened by Labour's defence review because such a review would be bound to take six months, if not longer. In addition, who can remember a review that did anything other than reduce defence expenditure and orders, let alone manpower? We would have to postpone crucial orders during the period of the review at great hazard to all those whose jobs depend on the sector.

Finally, on this topic, I make a plea to my right hon. and hon. Friends to ensure that the whole equipment sector is thought of in a strategic sense when decisions on orders have to be taken, rather than there being a concentration on the benefit to one or other of the major companies. I speak as someone with companies such as Lucas Aerospace in my constituency.

The last matter on which I will touch is manning and overstretch. That was mentioned at length by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), so I shall not dwell upon it. The Select Committee has identified a number of specific areas to which my hon. Friend the Minister will respond in his winding-up speech. Overstretch in equipment terms is demonstrated by reduced serviceability and readiness. That manifests itself as an operational issue where making savings on spares and reducing ammunition levels can and probably has seriously impaired the safety, effectiveness and fighting capability of the services. Cannibalisation is neither cost-efficient nor manpower-efficient, and I strongly urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to set up a team to examine that concern and make any changes deemed necessary before the problem becomes dangerous or an embarrassment.

It is now generally recognised that the Ministry of Defence's recruitment and manpower policy in implementing "Options for Change" was in some respects wrong, particularly with regard to the recruitment of school leavers. The Army in particular is still under-recruited by 4,000, but I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces for his recent efforts in that matter. Undermanning means that companies and battalions are not up to strength, and that places greater burdens on those who are serving—particularly in Northern Ireland. It also places strain on the time spent on training, and thereby impairs the effectiveness and ultimately the safety of those who serve.

My right hon. and hon. Friends will be concerned that we are still failing to meet the Army's objective of a 24-month interval between emergency tours. With the stalemate in Northern Ireland likely to deteriorate before it improves and with the prospect of a speedy withdrawal from Bosnia becoming even more remote, there can be no prospect of events alleviating the position. I hope that my hon. Friend has further plans to remedy the problem which he can share with us in his winding-up speech. I have been relieved to see a much more proactive recruitment drive for the British Army in the media in recent months.

Finally, I add my remarks to those of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside and of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East concerning our troops serving in Bosnia and Northern Ireland. It behoves all of us who take part in these debates to recognise that it is one thing to sit and speak in the comparative safety of the Chamber and quite another to serve in extremely dangerous and uncomfortable positions. I hope that we all do not forget that we owe them not just a debt of gratitude but an obligation to ensure that they can perform their duties with the right equipment, planning and supplies at all times to make their jobs as safe as possible. I commend the estimates to the House.

7.36 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I rarely get the chance to take part in defence debates, and I have been honoured to listen to the carefully measured speeches that have been made. I came here because I thought that the Secretary of State—who is so against the idea of a strategic review of the needs of our armed forces and of the United Kingdom—would lay out in considerable detail how he saw the future of this country and the amount of money that was to be spent in this important field.

I was—to put it mildly—deeply dismayed that at no point did the Secretary of State raise the question of the proposed privatisation of the national air traffic services. It was agreed that the privatisation of NATS was not only going to be difficult to carry out, but would have enormous implications because it was not only a civil service, but a service that was fully integrated with the Royal Air Force. The service has a direct impact on the training patterns of the RAF and the way in which the service is organised.

It was clear that if the privatisation were to go ahead, a number of urgent steps had to be taken first. The Select Committee on Transport, which looked at the matter in

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great detail, said that there was already enormous turmoil and change in the air traffic control services. There was a move afoot for the Civil Aviation Authority to move NATS from West Drayton to a new purpose-built building at Swanwick. The civil service had made it clear that it understood the implications of the dual nature of air traffic control.

The Select Committee said that before any decisions on privatisation were taken, certain basic safeguards would have to be accepted. First, it is vital that the United Kingdom retains two air traffic control centres. One does not need to be particularly brilliant to work out that a nation with a great deal of air traffic but only one basic air traffic control centre will get into great difficulty if anything goes wrong at that centre. There would be a danger of crashes across the United Kingdom. That would concern not only British traffic but traffic coming from all points of the globe. It was essential, therefore, that the Scottish centre as well as the centre in Swanwick near Southampton be retained.

Furthermore, it was clear that because of the changes the RAF had taken a value judgment—a very useful one—that it should carefully integrate much of its work with that of the civil air traffic controllers. They have always worked in tandem, but there were physical barriers and there was always a division. It became clear during the move that the services were prepared to take on board not only the need to work just as closely with civil air traffic controllers, but to integrate the work in such a way that they were all working superbly.

Suddenly, in the middle of all that and at short notice—less than three weeks ago—the rumour began to circulate that a new Civil Aviation Authority boss, coming in with great expertise from an industry that has nothing to do with air traffic control, had considered the matter and decided that we needed privatisation.

Conservative Members, who have made so much of the fact that we should protect the defence budget from the predations of Treasury Ministers, might like to know that there is a clear sign that the new reversal in policy comes directly from the Treasury, not because anyone has studied air traffic control operations and said that they need to be organised differently but because the Treasury is looking to pick up £600 million in a short time frame through privatisation because it wants the money before the next general election.

The Select Committee on Transport considered the matter and took evidence. The airlines do not want the services privatised. No one who knows anything about the matter believes for one minute that one can deal with the real needs of British defence or aviation by privatising an important and fundamental service. It is not like water, where one could blackmail people into making a profit. This service is fundamental at every level of our life and it needs to be properly organised and protected.

I saw the Minister with responsibility for aviation in another place. He was extremely courteous and explained, in his carefully chosen words, that the Department of Transport believed in "collective responsibility". I did not go to public school. I am sorry to say that, like a lot of people, I went to a state school. To me, that phrase means one thing—that someone else has taken decisions to which I am not a party and of which I do not approve. That is exactly the case at the moment, but it is worse than that. It is now being suggested that Swanwick will be the only centre and the Scottish centre will be closed or will have just a shell operation, with all the facilities concentrated in Swanwick. Anyone who does not understand the risk that that presents to both civil and defence aviation is not taking a responsible attitude.

Irrespective of the rights and wrongs of privatisation, to do such a thing would put at risk civil and defence aviation throughout the United Kingdom. The only way that the system could be maintained would be, for example, with some kind of contract with other national aviation centres. Is that what the Government want? Is that what they have decided? Why did the Secretary of State not take the opportunity to tell the House? He was here today. We have heard today how Ministers care about keeping the House informed. Why have they chosen not to do so? When I asked the Secretary of State, he had nothing to say. Indeed, he looked embarrassed.

The reality is that Defence Ministers should have asked and answered a number of important questions today. Do they intend to reinstate the privatisation of national air traffic services? If so, who has been consulted? The Select Committee on Transport criticised the Ministry of Transport last time because of its lack of consultation. Who has been asked for their views? Does the list include the chief of staff? If that has happened and the Government have accepted the move, on what basis have they done so?

Is it true that the air traffic control services and software installed at Swanwick are not capable of dealing with the new traffic and show dangerous signs of being unable to deal with the services that they will be required to deal with, with an existing oceanic centre and the Scottish centre, and without having to face up to double the normal traffic? Is it true that the Treasury is so desperate for money before the next general election that it intends to push the measure through the House by next February?

Is it true that the Treasury does not like the idea of a management buy-out and therefore wants to bring in someone else? Who is this magical someone? Who is to have total economic and political control of the airlines of this country, not just in times of war but in times of peace? That is what we are talking about. We are talking about a small island with crowded air space and a limited number of areas in which we can train our forces. We will be faced with a privatised service, run for profit not for defence and not in any way responsible to the House, as it should be.

If that is what we are facing, the Secretary of State is not only in clear dereliction of his stated duty but has a responsibility to explain to the House how he got into this position. Those questions should not merely be asked but answered. Clearly, the Secretary of State had no intention of telling anyone what had happened until the decisions had been taken. That is unacceptable. It is simply another example of a Government who have no sense of national pride or duty and who do not understand that defence does not mean handing over control of one's air space to someone else, but knowing what is going on in one's area irrespective of the pressures.

The Minister should remember when he replies that the House has a right to that information. It has a right not to be bounced into something rapidly, with decisions being taken and the sale going ahead. The House will reject

many of the thoughts behind this absurd idea because it knows that it does not work. Ministers should at least have the honesty to try to justify at the Dispatch Box what they think they are going to do.

7.47 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I hope that the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) will not mind if I do not follow her far down the road that she took. Suffice it to say that I am not quite as prescriptive as she is about the way in which air traffic control should be operated. There are plenty of small examples of military aircraft being controlled by civilians in the private sector. I hope that the hon. Lady has picked up that last point, which is important. Equally, it is important that we spend adequate resources on our traffic control to ensure that both airliners in the commercial sector and military aircraft are safe. The resources are important and in that respect I sometimes worry about the Treasury's short-termism in cutting capital budgets for the national air traffic control system only to discover that we have a crisis on our hands a few years later. Beyond that, I will not go. I want to concentrate on some of the earlier contributions to this excellent debate.

Over the past five years our armed forces have been asked to do more with less. I see that myself as a Reservist; I meet people in the Army and the Royal Air Force and occasionally in the Royal Navy. There is a fine line between expecting service men who joined because of their can-do spirit always to go that little step further—to complete the task properly, go where they are asked and stay up that extra hour at night or get up that extra hour early in the morning—and asking them to do too much, with too few people on the ground or in the air to carry out the task safely and properly. An element of frustration creeps into the system, particularly in the middle ranks, where people feel that they are not being given the tools to do the job or are apprehensive about personnel policies or about the latest study that they will have to analyse.

We have reached the point at which we can go no further in cutting resources and expecting our armed forces to complete the tasks that we set them as effectively as they do now. Sooner or later, something has to give. We are beginning to see that now in the difficulty that we have in recruiting infantrymen. That has happened for many reasons and many hon. Members have mentioned it tonight, so I shall not go into the details, but it is one symptom of the problems that arise if resources are cut too finely. We are under-recruited at present in all three services, although by only a small amount in the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force.

I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to give us an idea, either in writing or later this evening, whether he thinks that under-recruitment will get worse next year or whether it has bottomed out, particularly in the infantry, and that the welcome steps that have been taken to improve it are having an effect. I should like the Government to go further and to reopen a few more of the recruiting offices that they have closed because they are an important shop window for the armed forces. They show that they are open for business rather than being closed to business which, I am sad to say, is the impression given over the past year or two.

It is also worth mentioning the Bett report, which has often been referred to in previous debates but has not come up so much today. Those of us who still serve, as Reserves or as Regulars, would like the report to be put on one side for a little longer, to give us a bit more stability in the armed forces. I am sure that that would aid recruitment.

I said that we had gone far enough on spending. Some hon. Members will have heard me use this analogy before: the increase—just the increase—in social security expenditure in the past five years is greater than this year's entire defence budget. That is worth reflecting on when it comes to priorities. In that context, I warmly welcome my party's commitment, made in writing at the party conference last week:

> "Only the Conservatives can offer a period of stability both in terms of size and funding of the Armed Forces."

It is on the understanding that that stability in funding means no more cuts that I shall be prepared to support the Government tomorrow night. That commitment is important because it shows that this party believes that the cuts have gone far enough.

I was interested when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned that last year's underspend was only £220 million, whereas last year we were told that it was likely to be in the region of £500 million and that that amount would be rolled forward to this year's defence budget. We were told that there would therefore be no cut in the actual amount spent in the current financial year. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to tell me whether, as a result of last year's smaller than estimated underspend, this year's outturn will be £280 million higher than estimated last year or whether there has been a £280 million cut from the figures that we were given then. Where have those cuts fallen, if they have occurred at all? Last year we seemed to be saying that we had not cut defence expenditure, because we had that extra £500 million, but now we are told that the underspend was not as large as we then thought.

Having said that, I warmly welcome many of the savings that have been made in the defence budget in the past few years because they have enabled us to meet our commitment to ensure that the services are properly equipped. We have had a number of orders, and I commend my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and others, who fought hard for those in the summer; that they achieved them was no small feat. They were all desperately needed and included the Nimrod 2000, Storm Shadow, Brimstone and replacements for Fearless and Intrepid. They have ensured that we shall have a viable defence industry in the foreseeable future as well as achieving the primary task of equipping our armed forces properly.

I am surprised that the Labour party constantly goes on about the need for defence diversification agencies. The fact is that as a result of the orders, companies such as British Aerospace are taking on staff. Many people will have seen the full-page colour photograph of Nimrod in the appointments section of *The Times* a few months ago, which clearly shows that the number of people employed in our defence industries has now bottomed out. We now have highly efficient defence industries that can look to the future with confidence, largely a result of the Government's commitment to the orders that I have already mentioned.

I also warmly welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to Eurofighter 2000. The comments in the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* this morning were sadly

[Mr. Keith Mans]

ignorant of the facts. It is not a European Union aircraft. It follows a number of other aircraft that we have built together with our European partners outside the European Union but inside NATO: the Jaguar, built with the French, and the Tornado, built with the Italians and the Germans, are two examples. Eurofighter is coming in with fewer cost overruns than those two aircraft and in real terms is cheaper than the Tornado when one considers what it can do.

The best indication of how good the aircraft is came in a comment made to me by a senior United States general, who said that if it had been produced on the other side of the Atlantic the United States air force would probably have ordered 1,000 by now. That is what the Americans think of the product and that is why it is a little sad that some of our national newspapers have not grasped the fact that it is a world-beating aircraft. One of the reasons for there being so much criticism of it is that the Americans are genuinely—and rightly—worried about its tremendous capabilities.

I should like to dwell on one or two other projects. I sincerely hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to give a decision within the next few months on the METEOR 1239 future medium-range air-to-air missile. It is a state of the art missile. When money is spent on a platform, sufficient money must be spent on the weapons on that platform to ensure that it is used most effectively.

I should also like to mention the future large aircraft project. It would be nice to know when we shall finally sign up to the European staff requirement. If we genuinely believe that the European part of NATO must be enhanced and we have an independent ability on this side of the Atlantic for strategic air lift, we need an aircraft of that sort. I am not saying that we must necessarily choose the FLA, but I should be interested to know whether any other aircraft is as cost-effective. I genuinely believe that current proposal to be good.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Hear, hear.

Mr. Mans: Again, I am receiving support from the Labour party.

I also very much welcome the fact that, should we procure the aircraft, it will be procured in a new and more cost-effective way, with much of the development money coming from industry. The aircraft will be procured as an airliner is procured by an airline rather than in the more ponderous way in which we have tended to procure military aircraft.

Over the past five years, our armed forces have had to undergo two defence reviews: "Options for Change" and the defence cost study. They may not have had the word "review" in the title—there may be a reason for that; I do not know—but to all intents and purposes they were defence reviews. It might be worth while for everybody to admit as much. I should have thought that the worst way to restore stability in our armed forces would be to have another defence review, as proposed by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) in an article in *The House Magazine* this week. I understand that she was stating the policy of Her Majesty's Opposition.

I do not believe that any further defence reviews would enhance stability. They would do the opposite, making it harder for us to recruit the right calibre of people for the armed forces and making it harder for those people to do the jobs that we assign them.

If we are to have a review—or, more specifically, if the Labour party says that we should have one if it gets into Government—surely the country is entitled to know what Labour Members mean by a defence review. The document "New Labour New Life for Britain" contains fewer than 300 words on defence—shorter than the article by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West this week. That gives an indication of the priority attached to defence by the Labour party.

It is also significant that the photographs take more space than the text. The most significant photograph—I shall not mention the other two—is of a British soldier with a UN helmet. That clearly shows the defence priorities of the Labour party.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): May I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the text attached to the picture of the soldier, which he did not quote? It says:

"The British army plays a critical role in UN operations".

I believe that that is agreed across the House, unless the hon. Gentleman disapproves of the involvement of the British Army in that role.

Mr. Mans: Not at all. I agree that, under certain circumstances it is right that British soldiers should be involved in UN operations. I am pointing out that the choice of a British soldier wearing a UN helmet rather than a NATO helmet shows the relative priorities attached by the Labour party to different aspects of defence.

Let me pass on. *[Interruption.]* All right, I shall not pass on. I am much more interested in knowing what the defence review will do. The British people will want to know. That is what elections are all about. If the commitments are to change, where is the list of priorities? Will we reduce our commitment to NATO? Will we withdraw part of the British Army from Europe? Will we shut the base in Cyprus and perhaps withdraw our commitment to the UN in separating the Greek and Turkish Cypriots? Are we to cut the Royal Air Force and perhaps combine some of its functions with our European partners? Are we to get rid of our amphibious capabilities in the Royal Navy?

Those are a few ideas, but Labour Members could easily tell us now. They have all the information. They can tell us what their defence priorities are for this country, but they do not want to go beyond the general statement that they want a defence review.

Mr. Miller: The hon. Gentleman was present when I intervened earlier on the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin). As he is asking important questions, will he tell the House whether the Government will confirm the order for the Batch 2 Trafalgar class submarine? That is much more imminent than the issues which he is talking about, which are eight or nine months away.

Mr. Mans: I am not a member of the Government. *[Interruption.]* I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I am as hopeful as he is that the Government will confirm the

order, but that is a different issue. He has raised a specific procurement order. I am talking about a political party's commitment to defence, which ought to be put before the public before the election is called.

I strongly believe that soldiers, sailors and airmen join the armed forces to defend this country, either directly or through NATO or other alliances, allowing the rest of us to go about our lives in peace. They do not join, in the first instance at least, to don a white helmet and keep apart warring factions in third-world countries. They carry out such peacekeeping roles well, but that should never become their primary task. I get the impression that Labour Members would like that to be our armed forces' primary task. I associate myself completely with the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who made that point at the end of his speech much more eloquently than I could. Our armed forces exist to defend us rather than to carry out peacekeeping roles.

Finally, I am old-fashioned on expenditure on national security. I still believe, even in a post-cold war environment, that spending on defence should be the first call on the Treasury, not the last. Only when we have decided what we need to defend ourselves adequately do we cut up the remainder of the cake for the other, very worth while, public services.

8.8 pm

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I shall begin, as other right hon. and hon. Members have done, by expressing my sympathy for the family of Warrant Officer Bradwell, who was killed last week by terrorists. I am also deeply dismayed at the renewed bombing throughout the United Kingdom. We have to continue to hope that the wishes of the vast majority of the people of Northern Ireland for peace and justice may yet be realised. We in this House will do all that we can to achieve that.

As other hon. Members have said, the end of the cold war brought great uncertainty and insecurity to the world in which we live. In Europe, we are seeing a resurgence of aggressive nationalism that fosters bitter and deadly conflicts and instability. The peace settlement in former Yugoslavia is fragile. I think that it is holding only because of the excellent work undertaken by IFOR.

While the former eastern bloc countries clamour at the door of NATO and the European Union for full membership, Russia is politically fragile and volatile, and deeply suspicious of NATO's intentions, whatever Mr. Lebed may have said in Brussels last week. I agree with the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, East (Dr. Gilbert) earlier this evening on that subject. There is widespread concern about the regulation and control of Russia's nuclear arsenal, about possible conflict in the Ukraine, about the possibility of renewed conflict in Chechnya and about the Russian reaction to the Taliban movement in Afghanistan.

We dare not predict, even one day ahead, the next development in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the middle east, which threatens us all—as the Secretary of State said, so, too, does the heightened tension in Korea. Other problems include the activities of Iraq, the recent deaths in Cyprus, the continued military build-up in Turkey and the conflict in Algeria where, in the past four years, between 30,000 and 40,000 civilians and military personnel have died. I have mentioned just a few of the conflicts that are creating instability on the international scene.

It is against that background that our armed forces, which have been severely cut over the past six years, now have more operational commitments throughout the world than at any time since the second world war. We are proud of them and of the way in which they continue to be admired and respected worldwide. Their achievements have all too often been hindered, not helped, by the Government's gross mismanagement of defence policy, which has led to widespread overstretch and lack of morale. Increasingly, the armed forces are no longer clear on their purpose and what they are there to defend, which is why the Opposition are so determined that there should be a strategic review to bring some stability and security.

I have not yet had the pleasure of seeing *The House Magazine*, on which the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) was commenting. I do not know who chose the photographs; I was not consulted, but was simply asked, at late notice, to provide 300 words. I disagree with the hon. Member for Wyre when he claims that the defence costs studies in "Options for Change" were defence reviews. My view—and certainly the view of my constituents, who have been heavily hit by the impact of those studies—was that they were Treasury-driven defence cuts. The comments of the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee, the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), and the comments made in the Select Committee's report on the defence estimates demonstrate the Committee's concern about the Treasury-driven nature of the defence costs studies and "Options for Change".

Mr. Mans: How does the hon. Lady explain the fact that former Front-Bench spokesmen of the Labour party have called those two exercises defence reviews?

Ms Squire: I do not recall them doing that.

Mr. Mans: The hon. Lady was not here.

Ms Squire: I may not have been here at the time but, equally, I am not sure that the hon. Member for Wyre was present when my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) was explaining in detail Labour's policy and our desire for a strategic defence review. I am certainly not here tonight to pretend that the decisions—both short and long-term—that need to be taken are easy. I intend to refer later to some of those crucial decisions, such as the enlargement of NATO and the role of the Western European Union. We must recognise the need to achieve some clarity and the sensible matching of military resources and commitments, and the importance of bringing security and stability to both our service personnel and the civilian work force who back them up.

In that context, I do not think that hon. Members will be surprised if I say a few words about Rosyth, which has experienced another painful and turbulent 12 months at the hands of the Government's defence policies. It is easy for those cocooned in ministerial limousines and Whitehall corridors to ignore the harsh human consequences of their decisions. Ministers do not have to deal with grown men in tears because, after 30 years of loyal service to their country, they have been handed a compulsory redundancy notice. I want to pay tribute to the loyalty and commitment of all those who do not take the decisions, but who are placed in the firing line when it comes to implementing them.

[Ms Squire]

Some of the statements in the defence estimates surprised me. For example, paragraph 538, which deals with civilian personnel, states:

"Retaining and motivating staff of the quality needed to maintain a major Department of State"

is a major priority. Ministers should try telling that to my constituents.

Paragraph 614 states that negotiations are continuing for the sale of Rosyth royal dockyard. It then uses the dreadful phrase:

"announcements will be made in due course."

My right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and I, and those involved at Rosyth, have been hearing that statement constantly for the past four and a half years. The defence estimates continue:

"The Department has been seeking to improve the timeliness and quality of its reporting to Parliament".

It has been dodging, diving and ducking crucial announcements and decisions. I agree with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who highlighted so well the way in which the Government are trying to deal with the privatisation of air traffic control.

Will the Minister of State for Defence Procurement at least answer tonight some of the crucial questions involving Rosyth—questions that have been raised with him over months, if not years? Where is the contract for the allocated programme for the work of Rosyth dockyard? What is the Government's intention in relation to the pension fund surplus? Why has the Rosyth 2000 project not been given a complete go-ahead? Why is the only definite statement that we have heard that the decommissioned submarines are to stay until 2012, which, as I have told the Minister, contradicts what we were led to believe by previous Ministers and Secretaries of State? We were led to believe that if the submarine refitting work went from Rosyth, so too would the decommissioned submarines. Unless the Government are about to announce a change of plan for submarine refitting, what safety and security measures will there be? If the Minister will not make an announcement on the proposed privatisation of the dockyard tonight, will he at least give us a definite date when his Department will do so?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I hope that the hon. Lady will agree that, when she met me to talk about the decommissioning of nuclear submarines, she accepted that the Government had not led anyone to believe what she suggests that they were led to believe, but that perhaps some people took certain meanings that they would have found more comfortable for themselves, so the Government have not misled anyone about decommissioning nuclear submarines.

Ms Squire: I appreciate the points that the Minister made at that meeting, but I suggest to him that, at the least, the Government have not made their policies and their view as clear as they should have done to people employed by the Ministry of Defence. It has certainly been believed at Rosyth that the Government had made commitments that, if the submarine refitting work went, so too would the decommissioned submarines.

The Ministry of Defence police and guards have not been mentioned. I welcomed the Select Committee's eighth report on those issues and shared its fear that reducing costs might lead to lower standards. Will the Government act on the Committee's recommendations and call a halt to giving commercial security firms further contracts for additional work until there is legislation to regulate such firms and lay down minimum standards?

I welcome the fact that the Select Committee has urged the Government to say that this year's "Statement on the Defence Estimates" will not be undermined, as it has been previously, by further defence cuts announced in the Budget.

I repeat some points about the Navy that were made earlier. I welcome the statement on the replacement of Fearless and Intrepid, but I fully share the concern of the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside and the Select Committee about the size of the naval fleet. I support the Committee's recommendation that the next "Statement on the Defence Estimates" should include a table on the strength of the fleet, giving a clearer picture of the number of ships ready to go to sea within 30 days. I support the Committee's concern about the need for more frigates before the common new generation frigate project Horizon enters service, especially if we are to retain industrial shipbuilding capacity.

That leads me to reinforce some of the arguments that have been made about how crucial our defence manufacturing industry is. The past few years have been a time of unprecedented change and uncertainty; defence employment has dropped by at least 47 per cent. since 1980. I welcomed the announcements that the Government made just before the summer recess in respect of Nimrod, the conventionally armed stand-off missile and some other defence procurement issues, because there was tremendous anxiety throughout the defence manufacturing industry that those decisions would be delayed. Such delays have led to the loss of employment, as is evidenced by the experience of the Kvaerner shipyard at Govan.

Given some of the arguments that were made about the Government's policy on defence procurement, I wish to highlight strong criticisms of that policy made in the report by the National Audit Office. They show why it is important to have a clear policy on defence procurement and on defence diversification.

I fully support the Eurofighter project, and I hope that the British Government will bring pressure to bear on the German Government to meet their commitments to support the project. Labour's policy on procurement issues, and on taking a lead in developing European partnership as well as developing technological exchanges with the United States, is spot on. We need a clear rationale, and we need a defence diversification agency to help us promote and develop research and development and education and training.

I am aware that many hon. Members wish to speak, and issues that I intended to discuss, such as the Gulf, have been ably covered. I shall therefore move towards a conclusion by mentioning some of this country's future security challenges, which have been discussed.

I began by highlighting some of the great instability that we face. One difficulty, referred to by my right hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, East and others, is that we do not always make it clear, when we speak about the

defence of Europe, what we mean by "Europe" and how far to the east and south that definition should extend. Some Conservative Members appear to believe that Europe should end at Dover. I would say to those who take such an isolationist view that no country can realise its security objectives in isolation, and that Britain's interests are bound up with stability and security in Europe and a stable international environment.

I support the Government's commitment to NATO and its role in building security and stability in Europe in the wider field. We have witnessed the benefits of "Partnership for Peace" and several other mechanisms, especially in achieving wider military interoperability, which has been demonstrated by the implementation force in former Yugoslavia. We need to proceed with NATO enlargement, but to do so in a way that promotes and encourages peaceful behaviour among the would-be partners and does not create new barriers and divisions in Europe. Russia must be made to feel that she is a key player in that process, because not to do so will feed the enemies within her borders.

I support those calling for a continuation of the implementation force in former Yugoslavia, as obviously there is not sufficient stability there for economic and civilian development to progress if those forces withdraw. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell) spoke about trying to ensure that the United States is not persuaded by its own isolationists to withdraw from committing ground forces to such operations.

In conclusion, we must ensure that the Western European Union is developed as the European contribution to NATO; we must continue to build on the joint task force approach; and we must push for an urgent review of the United Nations charter and organisation and the whole debate about peacekeeping and peacemaking.

There are many challenges ahead. I look forward to the "dishonourable discharge" of Conservative Members and the introduction of a defence and security policy for this country by a Labour Government, who will promote the unique role of our armed forces, build international peace and security, and restore the pride and morale of all who serve this country so well.

8.29 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): All that I can say to the conclusion of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) is: heaven forfend that that should ever happen.

One of the intriguing aspects of taking part in a defence debate is that however many of one's lines may have been taken in the preceding four hours or so there is always a lot left to say. I do not intend to speak for four hours, hon. Members will be relieved to hear, but there are some things that need to be said which have not yet been said.

One can hardly represent a constituency such as Salisbury, which has more than 11,000 Ministry of Defence jobs, without drawing attention to some of the issues that confront its Member of Parliament and which I believe the House may wish to consider. I refer first to the new shape and role of Land Command, which has been successfully up and running now for the best part of this year. Its relationship with the rest of the military structure has been a huge success.

Salisbury plain training area is being increasingly used, and it has been managed with great sensitivity by the defence land agent and by the commanding officer of the Salisbury plain training area. Great sensitivity and ecological care have gone into its management.

The Royal Artillery at Larkhill has also played a notable role in the conservation of the Salisbury plain area. Boscombe Down has undergone huge changes to its function and role—as well as to its title, which seems to change every year or so. Still, we know it as Boscombe Down and I expect that the House will wish to know it as such too. It has undergone many changes of personnel and function, and those aspects remain under consideration.

It is always a source of mystification and annoyance to local people that Porton Down should be referred to as such when there are two discrete organisations there—the centre for applied microbiology and research, and the protection and life services division of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. All these add up to a significant defence science base of crucial importance to the welfare of our forces and to their success—linked, of course, to the defence nuclear, biological and chemical centre at Winterbourne.

Even the Royal Navy manages to get in on the act in my constituency, with the arms depot at West Dean. It would also be quite wrong to pass over the Tilshead cadet training centre, and the Old Sarum establishment, the headquarters of—among many other organisations—the Army Families Federation.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West mentioned MOD police, who are important in the Salisbury plain area, the military police and the MOD guard force. Following legislation on home service engagement, we also have the Military Provost guard service. Finally, if it is true that an army marches on its stomach, we have the NAAFI at Amesbury, which faces a challenging future under exciting new management.

Bosnia has already been mentioned many times, and I should like to concentrate on one or two of its family aspects. I was immensely proud to be a member of the OSCE observer team at the recent elections. One incident in particular encapsulated my pride in the IFOR troops, especially the British contingent thereof. It took place in a little village called Kljaci, not far from Travnik and just up the road from Vitez. When the polls closed at 7 o'clock in the evening and things were getting a little tense—no one was quite sure how the ballot boxes were going to get down to the town hall—there came the familiar rumble of a Warrior in the village square, heralding the arrival of the 1st Battalion Royal Green Jackets, who had visited the village five times in the course of the day, taking it in turns to have cups of coffee with the villagers and obtaining their complete confidence in the IFOR presence. They rendered the whole election process believable, free and fair to that village. I pay them my compliments; the incident sums up the important role of the Royal Green Jackets and other IFOR troops in Bosnia.

The Army Families Federation represents all who support the front line but who are at home coping with the problems faced by their spouses in theatre. I am delighted that the federation is so active in a practical and supporting role.

Only last Friday the wife of a soldier serving in Bosnia came to see me in my surgery with an appalling mess to sort out while her husband was serving overseas. It was a

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bureaucratic problem of the sort with which we are all familiar from our surgeries. In addition to doing my bit to help, I was able to tell her to get in touch with the AFF, which has someone who can deal with her problems and give her the support that she needs so much.

The federation has brought several continuing problems to my attention. For instance, the telephone links between Germany and Bosnia are still not as good as they should be. That matters a great deal. Moreover, British families still feel that they are losing out financially while other nations' soldiers are making money out of being in theatre in Bosnia. I know that the MOD has a tenable explanation for that, but it still rankles with Army families.

Overstretch continues to present problems for families too. Some men come back from Canada or Northern Ireland and have to leave again almost immediately for a year, and there is no guarantee of stability when they return. I do not know how much more of this the families are going to have to take. Sometimes the family dimension is overlooked when the problem of overstretch is under consideration.

The Army Families Federation has also asked me to mention quarantine for pets, an issue about which I feel strongly. I have pursued it with the MOD and with Ministers in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The problem particularly affects Army families. Business men and diplomats can afford to put their pets in quarantine, and they have considerable freedom to decide whether to accept a posting overseas. Not so Army families, a number of whom have been to see me about this. They have bought dogs in Germany, or taken their dogs there, in the expectation of a two-year term—only to be relocated back to the United Kingdom within a matter of months. One family was then sent straight back to Germany. Meanwhile their pets languish, and children and parents alike miss them.

I strongly support moves towards inoculation, microchipping and passports for pets. We should perhaps start with a trial with the rabies-free island of Cyprus.

I turn next to procurement issues arising out of the Select Committee's response to the White Paper of earlier this year. Will the Minister of State for Defence Procurement let us know whether he has come to a conclusion about the future of the royal yacht Britannia? That is not of burning military significance but it is of great significance to many people in this country, to the Department of Trade and Industry, to our businesses and to the diplomatic services, whose members make use of the facility. The Select Committee had a great deal to say on the subject. I certainly hope that the successor to Britannia will be built in a British yard, will be run by the Royal Navy and will fly the White Ensign, fulfilling an important diplomatic and ceremonial role.

Another issue arose from the Committee considering the Armed Forces Bill on which I had the honour to serve. We learned from our visit to Greenwich—quite apart from the issues surrounding the future of the royal naval college and the buildings—that there is also the issue of the nuclear reactor affectionately known as Jason. Has its future yet been decided? Perhaps it has been put in quarantine.

A surprising problem faced by the military in the aftermath of the Gulf war and Bosnia derives from the fact that, for many years to come, in any fast-moving battle the armoured infantry's effectiveness will be restricted by what is only a small element of the infantry's vehicles. It is clear from all the arms exercises that the FV 432, which is a mortar platform, is very slow. The whole Army has to go as slow as the slowest vehicle, which is the mortar platform. So either it goes without the mortar or everybody slows down. That seems crazy when we have staring us in the face a well-proven vehicle called Warrior. We need not invent it again but could simply put the mortars on the Warrior. We would then see a significant upgrading of our armoured infantry's capability. I hope that Ministers will consider the operational case for the Warrior, not least because it is made by GKN Defence, which is a significant part of the British and the west's procurement industry.

Will the Minister address some defence procurement problems? The first is the private finance initiative. May I put it in the context of Yeoman, the £2.5 billion project to replace Britain's military radio communications capability. The contract has cost tens of millions of pounds for the two companies concerned, Racal and Siemens, and decision time is only a couple of years away. A PFI initiative looks extremely attractive. It will be an immensely complex process and will involve converting 25,000 land platforms, including tanks and helicopters, to give them access to major data highways. The entire Army must be retrained. If we are to turn it into a PFI, we need some clues about how the Ministry of Defence is thinking about the Bowman project. Much could be gained from a PFI, but blind man's buff is inappropriate for a sophisticated procurement project like Bowman. The two Racal facilities in my constituency would like a clue about what the Ministry of Defence wants.

On export licences, British exports are undoubtedly being inhibited, particularly with regard to straightforward destinations for straightforward products. For example, Pains Wessex in my constituency took nine weeks to get a licence to export naval decoy rounds to Australia. It has a joint development contract with Saab of Sweden and has been doing the work for some three years, but the latest round of export licences took seven months to achieve. In the process, the Swedes felt discriminated against and could not imagine why they were causing so much trouble. There have been similar problems with Japan.

A fast track administrative system should be available for straightforward destinations and products. The DTI has been looking at the matter for a long time. It receives about 50,000 applications a year for defence export licences and rejects only a handful after a long period. Subject to the usual inspection and audit, and to severe penalties, there could be a self-licensing system for some exports. A grading system could be introduced in which grade A would involve the sale of non-offensive products to non-offensive countries, such as smoke grenades to Norway, Denmark or Canada; grade B would involve offensive products to non-offensive countries, such as high explosives to NATO countries; and grade C would embrace the sale of offensive products to special countries, which would require special treatment. In none of those cases would licences be granted to prohibited countries such as Iraq or Iran.

The other day on a wet Sunday morning I visited Salisbury plain. I congratulate the Government on their Youth in the Community initiative, and I thank the Home

Office and the Ministry of Defence for giving an important opportunity to young people in Wiltshire. I drove to Tilshead on Salisbury plain at the invitation of the Western Wessex reserve forces and cadets to attend part of a "challenger weekend". The chief constable of Wiltshire had kindly offered the services of his community officers to provide a link with those working among youths in our community who had strayed from the straight and narrow and received a police caution. The young people needed to be identified and their parents convinced of the value of such a project.

That was the first time that the Wiltshire Army Cadet Force had ever conducted such an event, but I am sure that it will not be the last. Twenty-four hours earlier, some 70 aggressive and spiky individualists had arrived on Salisbury plain. They were used to violence from other young people and adults. They had virtually no concept of self-discipline and certainly no concept of group discipline. The cadet force instructors, together with youth and social workers, had spent 24 hours taking them from one Army establishment to another, with initiative tests and assault courses. They had been out on the plain during the night map reading—or not—in the dark, and observing regular Army exercises through image intensifiers. After a few hours' sleep, they had woken to be piled in the back of armoured personnel carriers and given some real action on the training area. When I arrived on Sunday morning I found the beginnings of a coherent group of motivated young people who, although clearly exhausted, were bubbling over with enthusiasm for what one described to me as the most exciting weekend of his life. They had been shown and had to learn what group dependency and discipline mean, and had learnt about self-esteem and respect for others. When they had arrived on the Saturday, they had refused to do what they were told by adults and had to be cajoled into taking basic safety measures. By Sunday morning, they were talking happily with their Member of Parliament and standing in a straight line while the lord lieutenant chatted to them quietly about the value of discipline. I congratulate warmly the Wiltshire Army Cadet Force on the success of its first "challenger weekend" and I hope that the Government will extend and expand their successful Youth in the Community initiative.

To hon. Members for whom defence is a critical issue, last year's defence budget came as a disappointment in the sense that it was less than we expected. A number of my hon. Friends have drawn attention to that and the Select Committee report spells it out. It was clear then, as it is now, that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, with his inside knowledge of the Treasury, had fought successfully to claw back hundreds of millions of pounds and I congratulate him on that. I also congratulate him on tonight's speech and on last week's party conference speech. He has put down important markers about Britain's defence stance for the future in relation to NATO and Europe.

If the Labour party was hoping that I and other Conservative members of the Defence Committee would join them in the Lobby, they could not have tabled a sillier amendment to tonight's main motion. Wild horses would not drag me through the Division Lobby if the vote had anything to do with yet another defence review. Moreover, I have yet to meet a serving member of the armed forces who thinks that it is a vaguely sensible idea, and I meet thousands of them. The Prime Minister has given me an assurance about our defence stance in a letter of 22 August, so there is no doubt that I will support the Government on this. Defence Ministers must know that we know that the problem lies with the Treasury, so I for one will turn my fire on the Treasury and the Chief Secretary as we approach the Budget. I shall look carefully to see exactly how far down the pile of press releases from the Treasury is the section dealing with defence. So my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench can rest assured of my unfailing support for their efforts to fight in the public spending round not only for no further reductions in the defence budget but for an increase in it. That is what my constituents not only want but expect from the Government.

8.46 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I remind the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) that, when arms sales to Iraq took place, there was no inhibition at all and Members of Parliament were not given straightforward answers to straightforward questions. While Ministers continue to shelter behind phrases like "disproportionate costs", I hope that the rules are tightly adhered to.

I spent much of September following closely events in northern Iraq. After 12 days in the United States talking to people in the White House and the State Department and members of Congress, I am convinced that they are embarrassed by the United States' response to events in northern Iraq. Although at the beginning we thought that the response was necessary, it turned out to be the wrong response. As I said to the Secretary of State earlier, the result is that Saddam Hussein has consolidated his position in northern Iraq. In 1991 we promised the Kurds and the Iraqi Opposition that we would protect them against invasion by Saddam Hussein, but that has proved to be a very hollow promise. We have no short, medium or long-term policy regarding Iraq.

I put one question to the Minister. When I visited northern Iraq in January in an attempt to arrange the release of prisoners taken by both sides during that country's unfortunate civil war, I discovered that both Kurdish leaders were ready to travel to Washington to sign the peace agreement. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan released 44 prisoners and both sides were anxious to travel to Washington to sign the peace agreement which was the culmination of discussions that had taken place in Ireland and elsewhere.

Upon my return from Iraq in January, I met a Minister from the Foreign Office and told him what the two Kurdish leaders had said. I also asked him to get Britain involved in the peace talks rather than allowing us to sit on the sidelines as the Turks had insisted. I thought that the Minister would take up my suggestion as both Kurdish leaders were in agreement: they said that the Americans were relatively inexperienced at dealing with the Kurds and that Britain had far more expertise in that area. They wanted Britain to be actively involved in the continuation of the peace process.

However, nothing was done: Britain was content to sit on the sidelines because the Turks objected to our involvement in the negotiations. What kind of country is prepared to allow the Turks to push it on to the sidelines rather than play an active role in the peace process and thereby avoid loss of life and heavy expenditure? The Americans told me that the peace agreement was held up

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because Clinton was having trouble with his budget—the Republicans had pulled the rug from under him and the budget was frozen. What happened between February and August when the budget was unfrozen? In February, it would have cost $3 million to install peace monitors in northern Iraq, but in September it cost $200 million to send 44 cruise missiles et cetera to southern Iraq as part of an exercise that proved absolutely useless. It did not fulfil its stated objective: to protect the Kurds in northern Iraq. What sort of value for money is that—$3 million in February compared with $200 million in August?

What did the British Government spend on that exercise and what is the British Government's attitude to the American response to the events? I suspect that Britain supported the US in a show of solidarity. At the time, I must admit that I was glad of some response from the British Government, but I was waiting for a further response and a commitment to fulfil our promise of 1991: to provide a safe haven and to protect the Kurds and the Iraqi Opposition from further incursion by Saddam Hussein.

That policy clearly failed and has been changed. When I asked the Americans at all levels what had caused the delay, they looked embarrassed. When I posed that question at one meeting, a former American ambassador approached me and said, "I can answer your question: it was incompetence and ignorance." In that case, were we also incompetent and ignorant? We allowed the space of time between January and August to elapse and failed to seize the opportunity to bring about peace in northern Iraq.

One of those who chaired the negotiations said, "It may not have worked anyway." We do not know whether it would have worked; it may have, but we did not give peace a chance. That is a big failing on the part of those involved.

I turn now to arms sales. It is estimated that at least 100 wars have occurred since 1945, resulting in the deaths of more than 20 million people. As usual, civilians are the major casualties of those kinds of wars—women and children are killed in disproportionate numbers. There are at least 27 million refugees world wide and probably the same number of displaced people within their own countries. The former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, northern Iraq and Afghanistan provide recent stark reminders of civil war.

More than 1 billion people throughout the world—more than one fifth of humanity—live in abject poverty. In a world of plenty, lack of proper food and easily preventable diseases kill a quarter of a million children every week. The Brundtland report, which was hailed at the time, pointed out that major progress could be made in tackling four of the world's major problems—the lack of clean water, the destruction of tropical rain forests, the spread of deserts, and uncontrolled population growth—for the expenditure of less than one month's global arms spending.

Of course, wars will not end nor the world's problems be solved simply by industrialised countries adopting more responsible arms export policies. However, in many countries—including our own—if only a quarter of military spending were allocated to health, housing and education, we would be much better off.

Today the United Kingdom seems to be particularly proud of its record as one of the world's largest arms exporters. The United Kingdom actually promotes the export of arms at the taxpayers' expense through the Defence Export Services Organisation and export credit guarantees. DESO, which is a branch of the MOD, exists to promote and support British arms sales throughout the world. Its running costs amount to at least £16 million per year. In 1994, more than £3 billion worth of military equipment left the United Kingdom destined for other countries. In 1994, almost £543 million was provided in export credit guarantees for those exports. Scott illustrated only too well how export credit guarantees supporting the sale of arms can go wrong—for example, the £652 million that was paid in export credit guarantees to promote arms sales to Iraq. If we were to provide that level of support to civilian industries in the future, it would be better for the British economy and British jobs. The construction industry, for example, employs about 1.3 million people and that is about three times as many as the defence industry. Construction exports amount to about £4 billion a year, which is more than the total of defence exports.

Some people argue that if the United Kingdom will not sell arms to nasty dictators, someone else will. That may be true, but it cannot be ethical. We would not use that argument to support the state selling cocaine or child pornography. This country, which at least has some world reputation as a decent democracy, should not measure itself against such low standards.

Those who argue that jobs must be the main consideration must also look at the facts. In the 12 years up to 1994, jobs directly or indirectly dependent on the military industry fell by more than half, from 740,000 to 360,000. Of those jobs, 40,000 are directly dependent on exports and 40,000 are indirectly dependent. The Government underwrite arms exports by £1 billion a year. That is a subsidy of £12,500 a job each year and I am sure that many non-defence industries are rightly jealous of such support.

Even with the shrinkage in the number of jobs, the British economy is still more reliant on military production than any other in Europe, a specialisation which has proved something of a liability over the past few years as defence budgets have fallen. Given that the world market is set to decline by 20 per cent. by 2000, I think—and other people have made the same point—that the Government should develop a diversification strategy to avoid future job losses. That, of course, is the policy of the Labour party. The difficulty of shifting from making weapons to other products has been overcome in the past. Western countries adapted after the second world war and people went back to peacetime jobs.

For a start, we could stop the sale of arms to some of the worst regimes. Surely the United Kingdom could lead the world, as a major arms-selling country, if we just stopped encouraging and subsidising the arms trade in countries with the worst human rights abuses. Unless the main exporters of arms take a responsible attitude, there is every likelihood that major weapons systems will become the properties of countries which give barely a thought to human rights. One of the many lessons taught by the Gulf war is that international arms sales should never be governed only by commercial considerations.

The result of ignoring the morality of arms sales is now all too obvious, post-Scott. Arms are not like cars or fridges, since their function is to threaten or to kill. Their

export, therefore, must be considered with greater ethical care. Millions of innocent people have been killed in conflicts all over the world since 1990 and their deaths have been fuelled by the sale and export of weapons. As one of the world's leading suppliers, we must accept our responsibility for a deadly trade which ruins local economies, stunts development, increases regional instability and is responsible for massive human rights abuses.

9.2 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): The hon. Lady is probably the real voice of the Labour party and I could see her colleagues on the Front Bench squirming at some of her comments. I shall not follow her route other than to say that if the job had been finished in Iraq—in my personal view—the problems in northern Iraq today would be different. We did not finish the job and we are paying the price for that.

As the House knows, I have an interest to declare having served more than 40 years as a pilot and instructor in the volunteer reserve. I now hold an honorary appointment that gives me direct access to many aspects of RAF activity. I have recently spent a week flying at RAF Syerston and attending, at Cranwell, the making of a "This Is Your Life" programme about the life of the leader of the Red Arrows. My glider was used in some of the flying sequences, which was how I got in on the act.

I, too, wish to express my condolences to the wife and family of Warrant Officer Bradwell. It is sad that all the hopes that we had about Northern Ireland have come to nought.

I welcome my right hon. Friend's introduction to the debate and, in particular, I noted his comments about the armed forces' need for stability. We would all, of course, say "Hear, hear" to that and I would recommend that we would probably best serve that need by shelving the Bett report. It should be kicked into touch. If we are determined somehow to keep something happening, we could spend some time consulting the families involved. Perhaps that would keep things going for a while.

I have no qualms about the future of military housing. Ownership is not as important as use. I take that view about many things. I am confident that those running military housing will have enough knowledge of the Royal Air Force and sufficient background—I have in mind Sandy Hunter of the RAF, an old friend of mine—to look after the interests of the military.

I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench on the Nimrod replacement for the RAF and on the conventional stand-off weapon and the anti-armour weapon. We were told about the orders shortly before the House rose for the recess. I realise that it was touch and go whether we would get answers to our questions in time. I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on getting things done before the recess.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) that defence should have first call on Treasury funds, not last. Defence of the realm is the first duty of any Government.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) talked about the new Scottish centre. I agree with her that there is a need for a new centre. Anyone who understands the operation of the national air traffic services, as I do, knows that the RAF has a substantial input.

I am not unhappy about the public finance initiative or privatisation. I support both approaches and the sooner we get ahead, the better. One of the problems with Government-run bodies is that funding is not available when required because the Government of the day will not allow spending from time to time. That is not the way to run the national air traffic services. That is why I welcome it getting into the private sector by one means or another.

It will not surprise my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench to hear that, in the short time available to me, I wish to concentrate on a matter in which I have a deep interest—the Air Cadets and the Air Training Corps. I remind the House that the Air Cadets is both the ATC and the Combined Cadet Force Air Force Section—that is the RAF cadets of the Combined Cadet Force. It is often forgotten that there are two separate bodies.

I remind the House that the Air Cadet charter states that the object shall be to

"promote and encourage among young people a practical interest in aviation and the Royal Air Force; provide training which will be useful both in the services and in civilian life; foster the spirit of adventure and develop qualities of leadership and good citizenship."

I further remind the House of the size of the Air Cadets. There are 34,000 ATC cadets, 3,500 probationers and 8,500 cadets in the Combined Cadet Force, RAF section. There are 46,000 boys and girls in the Air Cadets. In addition, there are 10,000 adult staff, of whom 4,250 are officers and adult warrant officers. The remainder of the adults are civilian instructors. That is a total personnel of 56,000.

It is worth drawing attention to that figure, so as to understand that the Air Cadets and its parent service are now about the same size. That helps us to understand that in many parts of the country the only light blue uniforms ever seen are those worn by the cadets and the volunteer adults.

My right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench will know that there is a review of the Air Cadet Council under way. The council is the senior body of the ATC. It acts as an adviser to the Royal Air Force Board on ATC matters. It is not the senior body of the Combined Cadet Force RAF section, which has separate funding arrangements from the Air Training Corps.

I have no objections to the review of the council and its role, so I did not communicate views for or against the review when I was advised of it. I was, however, surprised and concerned when I heard that the Royal Air Force, through the personnel and training command, and Commandant Cranwell were to conduct a review of the public funding of the Air Cadet organisation. I was concerned about another review following so soon after the uncertainty of the defence cost studies, when Headquarters Air Cadets was moved from Newton to Cranwell, the AOC post of Air Cadets was removed from the Commandant Air Cadets to the Commandant Cranwell—a move to which I objected—and the budget was cut from £23 million to £18.7 million. The defence cost studies led to real cuts in air experience flying and to huge pressure on every budget, including public works and property budgets.

The civilian members of the Air Cadet Council and I recorded our concern about how fragile the morale of volunteer staff is during defence cost studies. Increasingly, many of them are questioning the

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commitment of the Royal Air Force, at all levels, to the Air Cadet organisation—although not at the highest level, because I have no doubt that the Chief of Air Staff and the Air Force Board fully support the Air Cadet organisation. I have no doubt that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench also support the Air Cadet organisation, and I know for sure that those on the Opposition Front Bench do.

I warn my right hon. Friend that it will not be easy to sell this review to the adult volunteers. It will be essential to make it clear that this is not another device to cut the Air Cadet budget, because otherwise many of the volunteers may give up. At a time of increased crime among the young, it would be crazy to put at risk an organisation that, in the words of its charter, fosters qualities of leadership and good citizenship—and, boy, does it do that well. That is why I recommended to the Commander in Chief of Personnel and Training, Air Marshal Sir David Cousins, that the terms of reference and the make-up of the review team should recognise the fragility of adult morale, thus making it transparent that it is not a review to save money and reduce the Air Cadet budget and that savings would lead to an increase in the provision of flying and summer camp allocations.

The Bulldog replacement programme is a good example of where the proposed replacement aircraft will bring about substantial revenue savings. I want to see those revenue savings ploughed back into additional flying for the cadets. I have been promised that that is what will happen, and I expect it to happen.

I suggest that when an RAF base closes and is sold, part of the proceeds should be earmarked to cover the cost of rehousing the volunteer gliding schools and other air cadet activities. It is realistic to expect some of the proceeds to be used for that purpose.

I have also made a specific recommendation that one member of the review body should be an individual with substantial volunteer experience. Sadly, I have to report that too many middle-ranking officers of the regular service have little understanding of the ethos and motivation of volunteers. They are not merely service personnel who can be used as numbers when making calculations; they are individuals who have to persuade their families of the importance of the job that they do. It takes some doing to persuade their families that they should go every weekend to fly the cadets and the volunteer units. I have known people who do that for 10, 20—even 30—or more years, and I expect the pledges that were given to me at the Dispatch Box about the Air Cadet budget and the range of activities not to be put in jeopardy by the review. I know that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench do not know in detail quite what the review involves; I am just alerting them to the fact that it is taking place and I want them to recognise that they have commitments that they are required to protect.

I wish to place on record my appreciation and respect for the way in which the United Kingdom military has handled the complex problems that arose from the defence cost studies and "Options for Change". In my view, there is not another military in the world that would have done what the UK military has done and carried out the many tasks that it has carried out during the same period. I wish to mention the leadership of the Air Force board—people whom I know well—and in particular Air Chief Marshall Sir Michael Graydon, the present Chief of the Air Staff. I doubt whether any other Chief of the Air Staff has ever had to deal with such complex and difficult problems affecting morale and equipment, and he has shown great leadership. He was the right man in the right job at the right time.

I am glad to see that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has come back into the Chamber. He will not be surprised to know that I have used most of my time in the debate to speak about the Air Cadet Force. I alerted his office to the fact that I would be doing so. I do not expect during the winding-up speech to get detailed answers to my comments, because they will take a little time. I just want my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench to do what they have always done: to apply their energy and wit to solving the difficult problems, if there are any, and to come back and tell me, "Bill, it's all right."

9.16 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I was reminded today of the fact that the Government pride themselves on having concern for the interests of agriculture and the armed forces: we had the private notice question earlier today about bovine spongiform encephalopathy, and now we are debating defence, but the Government's heartland has been clearly imperilled, as speeches from some hon. Members—loyal though they may be—will have shown.

I endorse the comments made by the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) about the Air Training Corps. It does a first-class job and those who give service to it deserve respect and commendation.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), who opened the debate for the Opposition, referred to a letter in *The Independent* from Flight Lieutenant Nichol. I recall reading the letter and feeling that it was not terribly fair, because he criticised politicians across the board and senior officers. I acquit senior officers. The hon. Member for North Tayside paid tribute to Sir Michael Graydon and Air Marshall Cousins, who have had the most horrendous experience over the past few years in contracting the service to the point that it is hardly bigger than the Air Training Corps itself.

Gulf war syndrome has been mentioned in the debate. I did not hear very clearly the Secretary of State's comments about the use of insecticides, but it is more than five years since people were squirting insecticides to protect themselves, and I do not think that they will be able to recall how they used the insecticides after such a time span. It is a serious matter and I am delighted that the Government are taking it seriously, although I hope that they will not encounter great delay if they go into excessive detail about personal conduct.

What has astonished me most of all in the debate has been the reference to recruitment, or the excuse that was offered about burgeoning employment. My hon. Friend referred to recruitment in the northern counties. The coalfields of south Yorkshire have traditionally sent enormous numbers of young men into the armed forces. We certainly have not seen burgeoning employment opportunities. I would hate to call for the reintroduction of national service, as that would be ridiculous, but far too many of my young people could be usefully engaged in the services.

The problem of air traffic control, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) referred, is serious. Given that the

Government are in the last months of their life—they should have gone by now, of course—it is reasonable to say that the House and the country should be given a clear picture of the views of the MOD and of the armed forces. One shudders at the prospect of profit dominating safety and about the possible threat to security. Whoever operates or owns our air traffic control system will inevitably be privy to important information, often confidential, about the capacities and activities of the Royal Air Force, the Fleet Air Arm and the Army Air Corps.

Some Conservative Members might say that it is ridiculous to think that the Government would sell air traffic control to a foreign power. But who owned Matrix Churchill and who made the lathes which made the shells that were fired at the Air Force when it was engaged in the most hazardous missions in the gulf war? They were made in Britain with the Government's knowledge. The Scott report has bored people and has been forgotten, but we would do well to remember that security must be given rather more consideration.

I said that there was a case for a review not merely for British reasons but because we need to present to our European partners a reasonable analysis of the enormous contribution that this country has made to NATO and to European security. With the exception of France, our contribution is far greater than that made by anyone else. We should argue that those countries which are pressing for a European pillar often make no contribution and have no consideration other than the commercial advantage that they think they can get from developing the European defence industry if Europe goes it alone. Since the second world war, Europe has never been able to go it alone and it could not do so now, not because this country is at fault but because our partners who are calling for the European pillar have not made the contribution that we were entitled to expect as equal members of the alliance.

I carried out a survey for the WEU a couple of years ago about the capabilities of western European air forces and the results were quite surprising. For example, I found that there was a marked lack of all-weather strike capacity and a marked inadequacy in intelligence and reconnaissance and that most countries had no capacity whatever for air-to-air refuelling, which is an intelligent way to operate very expensive aircraft. There were many aircraft but some were obsolete and I suspect that many of them had not been flown frequently because the flying hours of the air crew were lower than those of our crews. One wonders whether many or any of them reached the level that NATO is supposed to require.

Against that background, one is entitled to argue that a more intelligent and mature approach is needed. That could be assisted if we carried out a proper strategic review. I often wonder what our Ministers are doing when they are negotiating with our colleagues. We are paying heavily and making considerable national sacrifices. Our young men and women are repeatedly sent out to engage in hazardous tasks in insalubrious environments to fulfil the international cause, to serve humanity and to help to secure stability and peace. Our partners, who have a great deal to say, do little except applaud us.

On another occasion in the House I may have mentioned the incredible debate in the WEU at the end of the Gulf war. I was the last speaker in that long debate and Lord Finsberg—who unfortunately passed away last week—and I took part in it from opposite sides of the political spectrum. I think that the noble lord shared my view although he did not express quite the same irritation. I listened to, I think, seven Spaniards, six Portuguese, eight Italians and many others all rejoicing in jubilant triumph at this enormous victory. I was not popular when I said that those Parliaments had sent more parliamentarians to rejoice in the triumph than personnel to serve in the Gulf. From time to time we are entitled to speak out realistically because the current debate about Europe's future security is a serious matter. We are entitled not merely to punch our weight as members of the Security Council but to provide logical and, if necessary, firm arguments in the councils of deliberation of Europe during the next few months.

I am worried about the Eurofighter, as I have heard German Members of Parliament referring to the qualities of the Mig-29. It is a good aircraft, as are those produced after it. It would not require a latter-day Bismarck to see certain advantages in moving German aircraft procurement eastwards and leaving the rest of Europe with an inferior air combat capacity. That capacity would be inferior if the Eurofighter does not proceed. History can change rapidly, and a latter-day Bismarck may appear on the horizon. Britain must ensure—one hopes with the co-operation of other western European states—that it is not left behind as a result of short-term calculations. That is why I am delighted that the Labour party is strongly in favour of the Eurofighter, and has been for a long time. We recognise the economic and defence realities.

Many of today's transport aircraft are Hercules aircraft that—I have reminded the House before—entered squadron service in 1964. Those aircraft helped Britain in its east of Suez policy and they are probably being flown harder than ever before in former Yugoslavia. The Government recognise that they need to be replaced, and a partial replacement was agreed—following what seemed to be a fair compromise—with the purchase of part of the transport requirement from the new C130J. One assumed that the rest would come from the FLA, to which the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) has referred.

I am extremely worried because I went to Toulouse some time ago to be brainwashed by Aerospatiale. I asked when the aircraft would enter RAF squadron service if everything went according to plan. The company told me, but it also gave the members of the WEU defence committee a time chart that showed that the aircraft would enter RAF squadron service 12 months before it made its maiden flight. I pointed out that this presented a rather anomalous situation, but the company said that a great deal could be done with simulators. That is true, but they hardly provide an alternative to the actual experience of flight.

Given the cuts in the French defence budget and the uncertainty that exists, will the Minister tell us—or let us know by letter if it is not convenient to do so during the winding-up speech—what is to happen to the FLA? What will happen to it if it is delayed further than it might have been before the cuts that were announced a few months ago? That might mean that some of the Hercules that have been flying for 30 years in the RAF will have to continue for another decade. Those are the sort of questions that might be considered by a review rather than by the preposterous hand-to-mouth approach that the Government have operated for a long time.

[Mr. Peter Hardy]

As I said at the beginning, the Government have forfeited the support of the farmers and they ought to have forfeited the support of those involved in the services. There have been critical references to Labour Administrations, but I would point out—as did my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields—that the records of Labour Governments are superior to those of Conservative Governments. No Conservative Secretary of State has made the historic contribution to defence that was made by the noble Lord Healey in the 1960s when he provided the proper professional base for the armed forces to which many of them can still refer. I trust that the Government's gobbledegook of shallow and partisan insanity will not be repeated.

I hope that I have not spoken for too long—increasingly, I am of the view that we should have 10-minute speeches during defence debates.

9.28 pm

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): May I, first, apologise to those hon. Members whose speeches I shall be unable to cover in the short time that I have to wind up? It is fair to say that the debate has been slightly more low key than last year's but, then again, so was the trailer at the Tory party conference. However, some things did not change. We still had a lot of shouting, bawling and unparliamentary language from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, but we excuse him for that. He was probably still disoriented by the Prime Minister's recent attack on the old school tie.

Ministers and Conservative Back Benchers seemed to spend more time on the Back-Bench amendment than the selected amendment. They also seemed slightly out of touch with the current decisions of the Labour party conference. It is rather like the newspaper editor in "The man who shot Liberty Valance" who said, "If you have to print the truth or the legend, always print the legend."

That is probably why, for most of the debate, there were more Opposition Members than Conservative Members in the Chamber. It is also probably why the Secretary of State did not spend too much time at the Tory conference talking about his stewardship of the nation's defences. It is not surprising. He might have had to explain how in one year the Government have spent £500 million on redundancy and £100 million on recruitment and, as has been demonstrated in a number of speeches tonight, still got the figures wrong. It takes a special kind of genius to achieve that.

Let us consider the figures for the Grenadier Guards, for example. They are 84 short on their complement, yet they have had 40 redundancies in the past three years. Is that an effective way to keep the troops up to strength? Is it not a considerable cost to the budget?

At the Tory conference, and again today, the Secretary of State talked about possible Labour cuts. He has definitely learnt the value of diversionary tactics from the military. As Secretary of State, or in his previous incarnation as Chief Secretary to the Treasury, he has been one of the cutters-in-chief. During the 1992 election, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) said, the Government claimed that Labour would cut defence spending by 27 per cent.—yet they have cut it by 31 per cent.

Since 1990, personnel numbers are down 27 per cent. for the Army, 30 per cent. for the Navy and 42 per cent. for the Royal Air Force. Perhaps the Secretary of State, or the Minister in his reply, can tell us what further cuts the Treasury is demanding for next year. As the Secretary of State is well aware, it has been rumoured in the press that it will ask for £400 million. That is why the concluding paragraph of the Defence Committee report, which was amplified today by its Chairman, the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), and by the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans), is so relevant and weighty.

It was remarkable that a number of Conservative Members attempted to dissociate themselves from their Treasury, as though it was a Ministry from another planet. Let us be quite clear—we have a Tory Treasury and a Tory Chancellor and they cannot escape responsibility for that, valiantly though the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) tried.

It is not as though our commitments are reducing. As has been said, a bigger percentage of the Army is involved in operational commitments than at any time since the second world war. In spite of the bluster of Ministers, we need a strategic review of the relationship between our capability and our commitments. In reply to the question posed by the hon. Member for Wyre, it is self-evident—it has been said by Conservative spokesmen—that such a review can be undertaken only when in government with access to the relevant information. In such a sensitive Ministry, that information can be available only to Ministers.

At all levels, and from a number of hon. Members, in the debate tonight we have heard of the problems of overstretch. Let us be frank; it is also widely reported that the Chief of the Defence Staff is incredibly worried about sustainability. Maintenance capability is a part of the problem. The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) mentioned the Tornado accident off Blackpool. Thanks to the skill of the pilots, no one was injured. In spite of initial denials, it appears that it was one of the Tornados that had been damaged by the botched contract of Airwork Services. That is a salutary reminder that neither the work force nor the House have yet had a satisfactory report of the full cost of that fiasco.

We are also concerned about the continuing accident rate for our aircraft. Frankly, it is regrettable that the Ministry of Defence still appears to be considering each crash separately rather than having an overall inquiry. We have raised that matter before. By investigating each accident, it becomes all too easy to ascribe the cause to pilot error rather than to question other factors, such as lengthening training cycles and overstretch of personnel and machines. Rather than analyse those factors, the fundamentalist zealots in the MOD are plunging ahead with yet more privatisation and contractorisation.

It seems that the Government have adopted the simple mantra of their American Republican cousins: the Government sector cannot run anything. Nothing, and especially not the facts, will deter them. That runs disastrously contrary to the service tradition of our armed forces and of the civilians who work with and for them, yet still the Government plough on. RAF Valley has already been contracted out; Sealand, which has been mentioned several times by my hon. Friend the Member

for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), and St. Athan are in turmoil because of new tranches of privatisation. I reiterate what I said in the RAF debate on 6 June.

"We firmly believe that any decisions on contracting work must be determined by pragmatism not dogmatism. We shall impose a moratorium on new contracts while we evaluate the schemes that are currently in the pipeline."—[*Official Report*, 6 June 1996; Vol. 278, c. 745.]

My hon. Friends the Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) mentioned air traffic control services. We understand that the RAF shares the concern about privatisation and the proposals to cut the number of control centres from two to one. Will the Minister say what is the attitude of the MOD and what the proposals would mean for military and civil air safety and for Prestwick in Scotland? The people who work there, and the RAF, deserve a reply tonight.

Sustainability also affects the defence industry. Unfortunately, neither the defence estimates nor the Secretary of State's speeches to the Tory conference and tonight recognise the need to back British industry in the way that our competitors back their industries—but what can we expect from a Government that considered the Austrian alternative to the Land Rover for the Army field ambulance and when Metropolitan police Volkswagen vans are parked in New Palace yard?

I was at Land Rover last Friday and the only problem there is getting round the site for the number of contractors' vehicles there because of all the building work that is going on. Huge investment is going into Solihull from the new owners. Is not it a shame that its German owners seem to have greater faith in Land Rover than did the MOD? Was not it also a great shame that there had to be such a campaign to ensure that the orders finally went to Land Rover? It is a world-class product and we should have been backing it.

Mr. Arbuthnot: We did back it; we bought it.

Mr. Spellar: It required a Tory Back-Bench rebellion, Land Rovers parked in New Palace yard, uproar in the west midlands and consideration of the number of marginal seats there. What the hell were the Government doing even considering the Austrian alternative? No one else in the defence industry understands it.

Mr. Mans: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that we should buy military equipment without competitions?

Mr. Spellar: There was no proper alternative to the Land Rover. The hon. Gentleman should consider the practice of industry, which negotiates on the basis of preferred supplier status and works on partnership and open books. That happens increasingly in the defence industry around the world. It is happening with procurement policies in several other countries that actually back their industries and work in partnership with them. The Levene proposals have reached the end of their shelf life and we must find a new mode of defence procurement. The Government will not do it because they are attached to dogma. A Labour Government will do it because we will be looking to back British industry and work with it to get the best result.

The Secretary of State's speech at the Tory conference—he repeated the same formula today—employed a clever use of words. He rightly praised our world-class armed forces and equally rightly said that they should have world-class equipment, although whether his procurement policy will achieve that is another matter. He very clearly did not say that it would be British industry that would provide the world-class equipment. Once again, he slipped away from the key commitment that British industry and defence workers are seeking: that the MOD will back Britain and buy British first. That is what they want to hear, but they are not hearing it from Tory Ministers.

What about the extraordinary scenes that surrounded the award of the contract for the replacement maritime patrol aircraft—the RMPA—and the 1236 and 1238 missiles, which were referred to by the Secretary of State? I do not know whether to congratulate those on the Front Bench on having snatched the decision from their Tory Treasury colleagues at the eleventh hour or to castigate them for having let the situation deteriorate to such an extent. What I am sure about is that if we had not had a campaign in the country and rows in Parliament, the situation would have been allowed to drift and that contract would have dominated our debate today.

It is reassuring to know that pressure in the Chamber, not only from the Opposition but from Conservative Back Benchers, is able to have that effect, but it was extremely unsettling for the industry and the armed forces, not to mention the unfortunate Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs who got caught in the crossfire right at the end of the Session.

We have to look for a better way to undertake contracts and procurement. There are a number of lessons to be learnt from the RMPA and other recent contracts, the most significant being recognising the need for a shift in the system of defence procurement. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) suggested some of the areas that we need to examine in his thoughtful speech. Whatever one's view of the Levene reforms, it is self-evident that they have reached the end of their shelf life. The joint report of the Defence and Trade and Industry Committees pointed clearly towards a reformulation of policy, but the Government's response still fudged the issue. We need to take on board that report and what is happening in the real world. The Government are starting to edge towards doing that, but they cannot match their rhetoric. The replacement orders for Fearless and Intrepid had to be undertaken on a NAPNOC—no acceptable price no contract—basis because the Government recognised that mergers and reduced competition mean that we must bring about a change.

The defence estimates talk in fairly bland terms about Project Horizon, the common new generation frigate referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields. It is a joint programme with France and Italy but clear problems seem to be emerging. Britain still seems to be committed to 12 ships, but the French and Italians now seem to be down to two each. What does that do to the viability of the project? What about the delays, which are getting longer and longer? Can the Minister confirm that the first vessel is now due in 2006? Can he also confirm that the first type 42 destroyer that it is due to replace is scheduled to go out of service in 1999? What will be the effect of that gap? What extra maintenance costs will be incurred? Will those ships need a refit? What will be the consequences if that programme slips? Does the Minister recognise the great difficulties that have

[Mr. Spellar]

arisen with the project? Is it not time that serious consideration was given to a fallback position? We await his answers tonight with interest.

Before the recess, we had the drama of the married quarters housing, which was glossed over by the Secretary of State today in just a couple of sentences. The Government business managers down the Corridor were so worried that they dragged out the biggest attendance of backwoods Tory peers this Parliament—a scene described in *The Times* as

"An Iolanthe-style parade of hereditary peers."

In that debate, regular attending peers from all parties shredded the Government's argument, but Ministers won the day with those who never heard or listened to the debate. We know that, in this House, the Whips' pressure broke the resistance of Tory Back Benchers. I wonder if, on reflection, they think they did the right thing.

The members of the Burma Star Association whom I met last month were not very impressed with the Japanese landlords of defence housing. I note that, in addition to Nomura, extra funds will be raised in New York. I simply ask, what is wrong with the City of London? Why are we having to bring in money from abroad? What is the secret agenda? Is it to bolster up the balance of payments and massage the figures? Will that money be included in the figures for inward investment? Was it a good deal for the services?

During the debate in July, Tory Back Benchers justified their ignominious retreat by referring to the £100 million to be spent upgrading the property to grade 1 over five to seven years, but last year alone the Ministry of Defence spent £165 million on married quarters works, of which £40 million was spent on upgrading—£40 million a year over five years amounts to £200 million, which is double the allocation from the sale. Clearly, there is no guarantee of additionality from the Treasury. The housing budget is part of the defence budget as a whole and is not negotiated separately—we cannot know whether we are getting extra money. It is a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow—fool's gold—and there is no guarantee that the money is in addition to the budget.

We are not sure how much the Ministry of Defence will pay. The rental is linked to assured shorthold tenancy rents, which have rocketed up recently. The Minister believes that in future the rentals will grow in line with house prices. That is an unpredictable measure, which could claim an escalating share of the defence budget—all in the name of dogma and helping the Chancellor to balance his books in November. The capital value has gone to the Treasury and the unpredictable revenue charges will fall on the Ministry of Defence. That seems like a defence cut by any other name. There will be constant upward pressure on the rents paid by service personnel, which have already rocketed by between 10 and 25 per cent. in the past year alone.

During the debates in the summer, and again tonight, we promoted the idea of consensus on defence. The idea received half a welcome from the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside. The suggestion does not mean that there will be no arguments about implementation and competence. I can understand why the Minister of State for the Armed Forces is so sensitive about that—we will regularly advance those arguments—but in an increasingly uncertain world environment it would be better for the country and for our armed forces if we were able to achieve a broad national consensus.

I understand the Tories' dilemma. They believe that the defence issue is a strong card for them in the election—they do not have many. They think that that card has played well in the past, but it is much weaker now, as tonight's debate has demonstrated. The Tories would gain more credit, both in the House and outside, if they took up our offer. In a triumph of hope over experience, we hope that they will, so that we can all give our defence industry and our armed forces the backing that they need and deserve.

9.46 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot): Today's debate has been notable for the tributes paid on both sides of the House to Warrant Officer Bradwell—I echo those tributes and offer to his loved ones the condolences of the House expressed on behalf of the country.

This is a two-day debate, but right hon. and hon. Members may well raise important points that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces and I will be unable to cover during our speeches. We shall write to all those whose points we have been unable to cover.

The debate opened with a speech by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and was followed by a speech by the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) which was breathtaking in its rewriting of history. Before I turn to that speech—and I will because it was an important speech—I shall comment on the extraordinary speech that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar). He clearly abandoned the concept of competition and committed himself to buying British come what may—a policy that would be barking mad.

I shall tell the hon. Gentleman why we bought Land Rover. We did so because it gives us the best. Without competition, we would never have had such an excellent product at such a price. That is the value of competition—a value that the hon. Member for Warley, West seems prepared to throw away.

In his speech the hon. Member for South Shields criticised the instability that he suggested was produced by Government policies, but at the same time he called for a defence review. We know why he calls for an extraordinary defence review. He does so because he wants to mask the desire of most Labour Back Benchers—with some honourable exceptions—for defence cuts. Nothing would cause as much instability to our armed forces as a defence review. The hon. Gentleman has not been able to point to a single member of our armed forces who would like such a defence review. The Labour party's commitment is not to defence—it never has been and it never will be. We know that defence is not its priority. Defence under a Labour Government would always be the milch cow for their real priorities. Even the Transport and General Workers Union wants to cut £18 billion from the defence budget, and he who pays the piper calls the tune.

The hon. Member for South Shields did give an astonishing display of candour when he said that there was insufficient interest in the Labour party for the issue of Trident to be debated at the Labour party conference in the past two years—

Dr. David Clark *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Arbuthnot: He said that there was insufficient interest for the whole defence issue to be debated in the past two years.

Dr. Reid: The Minister has obviously been given another bad briefing, a year out of date. We said that the whole debate surrounding the decision whether to cut defence expenditure was so lacking in interest and had so little backing that it did not appear on the conference agenda. The Trident issue was debated and, for the second year running, multilateralism won the day, so Labour's position on that is the same as that of the Government. At least I have cut the Minister's speech short, so that he has more time to devote to the real subject of procurement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: But that is not the point; the point is that Labour Members are keeping shtoom. Last year, 43 Labour Members signed an amendment to the motion in the defence estimates debate—an amendment calling for a cut in defence budgets and for the removal of Trident. This year, only 20 have done so, but that does not suggest for a moment that the other 23 have changed their minds. They have not changed their minds; and if they have, are we not entitled to ask why?

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) called for the removal of all nuclear weapons from British territory. Has he changed his mind? It would seem that perhaps he has; yet he has never said why. The hon. Member for South Shields once said that he would not be prepared to use a nuclear weapon. Has he changed his mind? It would be interesting to find out. And if he has, why?

Dr. David Clark: In 1981 I was deputy defence spokesperson for the Labour party, and I resigned when the party went unilateralist in the 1981 conference. [HON. MEMBERS: "Wrong again."]

Mr. Arbuthnot: So why did the hon. Gentleman say that he would not use a nuclear weapon? Saying something like that destroys the deterrent.

I want to give the hon. Member for South Shields replies on the substance of some questions that he asked. He made an important issue of organophosphates and their use in the Gulf. I can confirm that the issue of the handling of the reports received by the Ministry of Defence and the reasons why they were not fully considered or acted on will be fully evaluated in the further work that we have immediately set in hand.

I very much regret that the information given to the Defence Select Committee and other hon. Members in the past few years has proved to be incorrect. The answers were given by Ministers in good faith, on the basis of advice from senior military and civilian staff in the Department. We are urgently examining the exact circumstances in which organophosphate pesticides were used and the extent of their use. Hon. Members will understand that I would not wish to prejudge the outcome of that work, but my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will report further to the House when the work is complete.

Mr. Dalyell: The House of Commons might be forgiven for wondering why, when, as the Minister admits, the proper questions were asked, the Department or the Ministers—admittedly, previous to him—were so lazy, I repeat lazy, that they did not get the right answers years ago.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Yes, and that is the point of part of the investigation that is taking place at the moment. I fully accept that the Department should have known the correct position much earlier, especially in the light of anxieties expressed about pesticide use. That is why my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces has commissioned a further investigation as a matter of urgency.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest—[HON. MEMBERS: "Wyre."] I apologise. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) referred to the future medium-range air-to-air missile. The assessment of bids is under way, and we hope to complete that assessment and to reach a decision around the middle of next year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre also referred to the defence budget, as did a number of other hon. Members. I can assure the House that the Government are committed to providing the armed forces with the manpower and equipment they need to undertake the tasks which our defence and security policies place on them. We will continue to provide the resources to sustain those capabilities.

While efforts to achieve ever greater value for money in defence continue, we have made it clear that, under this Government, the big upheavals are over. We have undertaken to provide a period of stability in the plans for our forces.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), the Chairman of the Select Committee—

Mr. Spellar *rose—*

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have only five minutes left and a lot of points to cover, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me. I shall be making a speech tomorrow, but tonight I should like to answer as many questions as possible.

My hon. Friend referred to the decommissioning of nuclear submarines. It is our policy to store decommissioned nuclear submarines afloat at the place where they are decommissioned until a decision about their final disposal is made. My hon. Friend also referred to Jason, the small teaching nuclear reactor at Greenwich. As part of future plans for the royal naval college site there I am pleased to confirm that the reactor will be decommissioned. The appointment of AEA Technology as project manager, and of Dr. Bryan Edmondson as independent safety adviser, illustrates our commitment to safety and openness during the process.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): The Minister will be well aware of the natural concern in Greenwich, which

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

will be the focus of world attention in millennium year, about the possibility of delay in the decommissioning, with consequential disastrous results if the work is still taking place at a time when the eyes of the world will be on us, with large numbers of visitors coming to see the historic buildings at Greenwich. What reassurance can he give the House that decommissioning will take place speedily so as to ensure that everything is completed safely by 1999?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I could not have announced the decommissioning any earlier than today's debate: this is our first day back from the summer recess. I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman.

My hon. Friends the Members for Romsey and Waterside and for Salisbury (Mr. Key) raised the important issue of the Warrior mortar. My Department welcomes the private finance initiative proposals from industry; I understand the commercial concerns that have led GKN to make its current proposals to supply Warrior mortar vehicles to the MOD. We take full account of relevant industrial considerations when making decisions about equipment, and we actively support GKN in marketing Warrior overseas. I have made it clear before to the House that Warrior is an excellent vehicle which has performed extremely well in operational service in Bosnia, just as it did in the Gulf. My Department will respond to the company shortly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) discussed deployment of the deterrent and the question of the two Trident submarines. Our current deterrent is provided by two Trident boats and by RAF Tornadoes carrying WE177 freefall bombs. We have always planned to have only two boats in service for a short period; the Trident fleet will reach four boats by the end of the century.

Next, recruitment, which was raised by a number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre, who asked whether we would have similar difficulties in the following year. I can give him details of the achievement targets that we have reached. Against the targets for the first six months of this year, the Royal Navy achieved recruitment of 89 per cent. for officers and 85 per cent. for ratings. Figures for the Royal Marines were 100 per cent. for officers and 84 per cent. for other ranks. The Army predicts that officer recruitment for the whole year will reach 86 per cent. of target. For the other ranks in the Army, recruitment in the first six months of this year reached 86 per cent. of target. The point is that it was an increase of 40 per cent. on the performance level for the same period last year. The most promising indicator was the increase in recruitment in the infantry, where 86 per cent. of six-month targets compared with 53 per cent. over the same period last year. The RAF is confident that it will have achieved a recruitment level of 90 per cent. of its target for both officers and airmen by the end of 1996-97.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury raised the issue of Bowman and suggested that blind man's buff was being played. The procurement executive, including the Chief of Defence Procurement, regularly speak to the two consortia that have been developing systems to meet our Bowman requirement, so there is no question of blind man's buff being played. But I listened to my hon. Friend's view with interest.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) asked some important questions about the air cadet council. There is no question that the review is being undertaken as a cost-driven exercise. It is to look at the role of the air cadet council, and the RAF still attaches great importance to the role of the air cadets.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

PETITIONS

Handguns

10 pm

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): This petition has been signed by the citizens of Dundee and area. I say "area" because, when civil servants look at the petition, they will see that, during the holiday period, visitors passing through the centre of Dundee insisted on signing the petition.

The people of Dundee are concerned that the House should introduce legislation to ban the private ownership of handguns. On 13 March, Thomas Hamilton inflicted 17 death sentences and multiple life sentences on the innocent people of Dunblane. The petition that I am presenting this evening carries 3,250 signatures and says:

The Petition of the citizens of Dundee and area:

Declares that the private ownership of hand guns should be banned. Hand guns are particularly dangerous firearms, they are easily concealed and carried. They are capable of rapidly firing a large number of rounds without reloading and are therefore extremely dangerous in private hands.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons introduce legislation to ban the private ownership of hand guns, and the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

10.1 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): I, too, wish to present a petition from the citizens of Dundee and area. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), I spent most of the summer recess helping to collect signatures in my constituency of Dundee, East, which was part of the citywide petition led by my hon. Friend and myself. Like his petition, mine declares that the private ownership of handguns should be banned, as handguns are dangerous firearms and are easily concealed and carried. They are capable of rapidly firing a large number of rounds without reloading and are therefore extremely dangerous in private hands. The petition reads:

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons introduce legislation to ban the private ownership of hand guns, and the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Maternity Services, Monklands

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

10.2 pm

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): I am grateful for the opportunity to bring before Parliament an issue of great concern to my constituents. I am grateful to have this opportunity so soon after the House has returned from the summer recess, because the issue has exercised my hon. Friends and myself during the recess. I sought this debate urgently because of a developing problem that could deprive mothers in my constituency of local maternity services. That is bad enough in itself, but the impact of removing localised services could also have a bad effect on paediatric care in the local district general hospital, putting children, some of whom have life-threatening conditions, at considerable risk.

The problem has arisen because of Lanarkshire health board's desire to close the local Bellshill maternity hospital, which is part of the Monklands and Bellshill hospital trust. It wants to locate maternity provision at a new hospital to be built at Netherton in Wishaw to replace the existing Law hospital. Let me make it abundantly clear at the beginning of my contribution: I do not oppose the establishment of maternity facilities at Netherton. Rather, I believe that the needs of Lanarkshire mothers and children would be best met, if Bellshill should close, by two-site provision at general hospitals in both Netherton and Monklands. It is ludicrous to suggest at the end of the 20th century that expectant mothers should face increased inconvenience, not to mention risk, when one of the main achievements of the first part of the century in Lanarkshire was the provision of more appropriate localised care in that county.

Time is of the essence in this matter as the local health board is currently involved in a consultation exercise that I believe is based on a totally false premise. If the wrong decision is arrived at as a consequence of that exercise, it could have an adverse effect on health care in the northern part of Lanarkshire for a long time. I cannot overstress the importance of those issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) and I represent an area that has the dubious record as one of the unhealthiest places in Europe. I know that the Minister recognises that fact and I urge him to consider my remarks not just in the light of maternity provision, but in the face of the generally recognised need to concentrate on improving health care in Monklands generally. That is particularly true in relation to children.

In seeking to effect the closure of Bellshill maternity, the health board has made an unwarranted attack on the safety of the service that is provided. It is a stand-alone specialist facility that provides top-class care from a committed staff. Both past and present mothers in my constituency have much to thank Bellshill maternity hospital for. Notwithstanding that fact, the health board has suggested that the facility is unsafe, based upon a misreading of the "Report of the Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths in the United Kingdom 1991-1993", which states on page 193 that units on sites away from acute hospitals "should be regarded as unsafe".

Based on that sentence, the health board has taken an insensitive line that is insulting to the staff at Bellshill and has caused alarm among mothers in my constituency who expected to be delivered there in the near future. That statement is not true. The quotation upon which the health board is relying refers to very small units that do not have blood transfusion and anaesthetic services and are sited more than 20 miles from an intensive care unit. That is not the case with Bellshill—indeed, only a few units in England are affected. I contend that the health board is using the safety argument to avoid the economic arguments.

Bellshill is the largest maternity hospital in Lanarkshire. It has obstetric, midwifery, anaesthetic and paediatric staff who care for between 3,700 and 4,000 women and their babies each year. They are experienced in dealing with normal and abnormal pregnancies. There is a neonatal intensive care unit, which has a successful record in treating very ill premature babies as young as 24 weeks gestation and 500 g birth weight.

Neonatal care in Lanarkshire matches the best provided at the large teaching hospitals, resulting in Bellshill being used as a back-up by hospitals in the north of England and elsewhere in Scotland when their units are full. The staff are recognised widely within their profession, but were they included in the strategic analysis by the health board or invited to comment on the completed review? No, they were not. The board claimed that the working party comprised a sound body of local expertise, yet no identities were revealed. Why were local experts kept in the dark? Is that the way to devise an accurate and unbiased strategy?

Furthermore, the board claims that it has based its conclusions on projected births to Lanarkshire women by 2005. How did it come to those conclusions? Where is the evidence that it has taken account of the significant inward investment in Lanarkshire from both Chunghwa and Lite on, which will inevitably cause an increase—we are very glad of it—in the number of people moving to Lanarkshire? The board assumes that 30 per cent. of mothers will want to give birth in Glasgow. On what does it base that conclusion? The geographic difficulties associated with travelling from the northern part of my constituency to Wishaw could leave mothers with no choice but to make the longer journey to Glasgow, as trans-county transport in Lanarkshire is extremely bad. If the birth rate in Lanarkshire falls to between 52 to 55 per cent., which is what the projections could lead to, the viability of the new unit at Netherton could be in question and mothers in my constituency would be further disadvantaged.

In the past week, obstetricians and midwives in Lanarkshire have conducted a mini-survey of 100 mothers in antenatal units throughout the county. If Netherton were the sole Lanarkshire site, 91 per cent. of mothers in Coatbridge say that they would have to travel to Glasgow. In Airdrie, the largest town in my constituency, 69 per cent. would have to travel to Glasgow and, from Viewpark, 57 per cent. So it continues. Geography does matter and that is why I do not make an exclusive case for maternity facilities to be provided only at Monklands general hospital.

Lanarkshire health board has a duty to provide health care for all the mothers of Lanarkshire, not to offload some of that responsibility to Glasgow to make its accounts look neater. Its approach will remove true choice from mothers and it looks suspiciously like an accounting exercise to reach the economically attractive figure of 4,000 deliveries. Any deliveries over that number would

[Mrs. Helen Liddell]

make the proposed Netherton unit unsafe. I urge the Minister to challenge the health board on why it is discounting the needs of one third of Lanarkshire mothers.

The health board survey that was conducted among mothers was also seriously flawed. The mothers consulted were those who had, thankfully, normal births and therefore did not require follow-on care. It is precisely the mothers who do not have normal births, or who have babies in need of neonatal intensive care, who should be taken into account. The sampling was not done by a professional polling organisation, as it was in Edinburgh when a similar case arose, and serious questions must be asked about how truly significant the analysis has been.

The survey defies common sense, quite apart from random sampling techniques. If a mother is in a maternity hospital for more than two days, it is usually for a significant reason—either she or her child is poorly. If we site maternity provision at Netherton, mothers who are not physically or emotionally at their best will have to undertake a difficult journey. My constituency is not a wealthy area and we do not have high ownership of private cars as people do in other parts of Scotland. It is difficult to envisage how some of those mothers and their families could cope with the journey across the county to a facility at Netherton. It would be equally difficult for mothers from the south of Lanarkshire to travel to a unique facility in Monklands district general hospital.

If Bellshill is to be closed, the costs of submerging a stand-alone facility into two general hospitals, with the economies of scale that would involve—together with the clinical arguments—seem to make a self-evident case for a two-site facility. Why has that idea been given the brush-off by Lanarkshire health board?

The local people, whenever I talk to them about the facility, say that they believe that the consultation has nothing to do with their needs and everything to do with cobbling together an attractive private finance initiative deal for the new hospital. If that rumour is true, it is a scandal that outweighs any that we have seen so far.

I spoke earlier about general health in Monklands. An analysis of maternal morbidity in north Lanarkshire in the past three years shows that Hamilton, Airdrie, Coatbridge and Motherwell have the highest levels of morbidity requiring in-patient stay. Neonatal morbidity shows a similar pattern, and Hamilton, Airdrie, Coatbridge and Bellshill have the highest incidence of low birth weight babies. Even among so-called normal births, there is a shift towards the north of the county in relation to admissions to high-dependency neonatal care. Those figures show that there must be easy access to a unit close to those areas of high morbidity if the situation is to be contained and reversed.

Paediatric care pops up almost as an afterthought in the health board's deliberations. That afterthought could completely destroy the advances of the past 20 years in ensuring that sick children in Monklands have the best care when they most need it. The issue of paediatric services did not form any part of the remit of the original strategic review. It has now sneaked in and could have the most serious repercussions for Monklands hospital and the patients it serves.

I received a letter from Dr Marie Brookes, who is an accident and emergency consultant at Monklands district hospital. I urge the Minister to listen closely to what she has to say. Dr. Brookes points out that 22,000 children under 15 years of age are treated in A and E at Monklands hospital. They comprise one third of the work load of her department. Two thousand of those children are ill enough to be admitted to hospital, yet under the health board's proposals, there will be no beds at Monklands. Four hundred children are currently admitted to the infectious diseases unit through A and E. That unit is to be taken away as well.

Monklands provides the acute head injury service for children in north Lanarkshire; that will cease, too. Dr. Brookes says that her anaesthetist colleagues join A and E in the intensive care of critically ill or injured children who may require to be admitted to Monklands hospital or transferred to Yorkhill. If the paediatric A and E emergency service at Monklands is lost, children will face a journey without prior resuscitation. Is that acceptable?

With her colleagues, Dr. Ian McLaren and Dr. Martin Watt, Dr. Brookes states that in line with national recommendations they would not be willing to provide an A and E service for children at Monklands without the on-site support of senior paediatric colleagues. She states:

"The scenario of the transfer of up to 2,000 children by ambulance to other units is one which we would not wish to face and which will deplete the Department of Medical and Nursing Staff and increase the demands on the Scottish Ambulance Service."

Dr. Brookes continues:

"Your constituents and their children will be forced to take their sick and injured children either to Netherton or Glasgow. At best, this may be inconvenient, economically (for them) unacceptable, and for a minority of children, a life-threatening scenario. Our recent experience with meningitis confirms that time is of the essence and that the delays inherent in these plans are medically and ethically unacceptable."

She concludes:

"That these matters have not even featured in the discussion documents, must be a measure of ignorance or ineptitude of those who have formulated and promulgated these proposals."

That is a warning that I find chilling.

Dr. Brookes' remarks are backed up by Dr. John White, a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist, by Dr. John Grant, also a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist and the editor of the obstetric and gynaecology journal. Consultant haematologists, anaesthetists, midwives and general hospital staff have already contacted me with their grave concerns. The entire community, including Churches and voluntary organisations, is unanimous in its opposition to what is proposed.

I urge the Minister to use his powers to insist that the consultation process starts again, with full involvement this time with those directly involved and with a more rigorous analysis of maternal preference and projected births. The survey of recently delivered mothers is not acceptable. There is potential for a greater number of births in Lanarkshire than that which has been taken into account. A wrong decision now could lead to a significant problem for my constituents and their children, probably for the next generation. I urge the Minister to use his good offices to ensure that it is not visited upon my constituents.

10.18 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): I am grateful to the Minister for his courtesy in allowing me to make a brief contribution to the debate. I declare three interests: I

am the Member who represents the constituency in which Bellshill maternity hospital is situated; I was born at Bellshill maternity; and I predicted as soon as the Lanarkshire health board became a trust that it would close the maternity hospital within 10 years. I was five years out because the decision has been made five years earlier than my prediction.

I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) for initiating it. I wish to see the Bellshill maternity hospital remain. It has been a stalwart in the provision of medical services for the people of Lanarkshire for many years. I have never been convinced by the arguments for its closure and I remain unconvinced.

The central argument is that there will be less risk to expectant mothers in pre-natal and maternity care if the unit is placed within the context of a general hospital. I know that we are talking of the very margins of risk. I know also that the emphasis that has been placed on that argument has been challenged by obstetricians, midwives and others. Even if I accepted that the argument was a logical reason for closing the maternity hospital at Bellshill, it would be offset if the facility were to be placed in a general hospital servicing a huge area, with the consequent inconvenience, cost and risk to health given the huge distances that would have to be travelled.

I urge the Minister to consider sympathetically the case made by my hon. Friend. If Bellshill maternity hospital ultimately has to close after a proud record of service, it should be replaced by maternity services at Netherton and Monklands general hospitals—two general hospitals at either end of a vast area.

10.20 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) on her speech. There is also strong representation from Lanarkshire through the hon. Members for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) and for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), as well as from the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), not to mention the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire).

The board proposes that paediatric services should be centralised at the site of in-patient services at the New Law hospital. They will be underpinned by appropriate out-patient and day care facilities at Monklands and Hairmyres hospitals and elsewhere, the purpose being to improve care available to the children of Lanarkshire.

The hon. Lady can be assured that the board is not saying that care at Bellshill is currently substandard, but in reaching its decision it had regard to the publication earlier this year by the Department of Health of the report on confidential inquiries into maternal deaths in the United Kingdom between 1991 and 1993. That report contained the key message that consultant units on sites away from acute hospitals—Bellshill, for example—and without appropriate and adequate facilities are now in a significant minority, and should be regarded as substandard. It recommended that there should be renewed efforts by health authorities to correct those deficiencies. The board took that recommendation into account.

I must make it clear that no decisions have been made on this matter. Last month, Lanarkshire health board published its consultation paper on the future of maternity and related services. It was the product of a two-year review aimed at renewing maternity services in Lanarkshire to provide the best care possible for mothers and their babies into the next century. The future shape of maternity services for the residents of Monklands is a key element of the board's proposals. The board will consult widely on those proposals between now and early December.

The issues that we are discussing this evening are at the heart of that programme of reinvestment for the future. No final decisions have been made. I can give hon. Members an assurance that no hospital closure can or will take place until new and better facilities are in place. I understand that the time scale in the proposal relates approximately to the year 2000.

I welcome this debate as an opportunity to air views that can be fed into the consultation process—and they certainly will be. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for highlighting the concerns of her constituents: it is important that they are heard.

In-patient facilities are a key aspect of the health board's service review. A key outcome is that the existing pattern of service provision in Lanarkshire will not be sustainable in the future in the context of the new, localised approach to maternity care in which the health board is investing. The review considered the position of Bellshill. Bellshill is a stand-alone maternity hospital, and currently provides care for around 3,300 births each year. Having consulted widely, the board rejected the option of centralising future in-patient services at Bellshill. Clear advice from national and local bodies is that such stand-alone maternity units, lacking the back-up facilities for more specialised care, should be phased out. Wherever possible, maternity units should have available the full range of clinical support services of a major acute hospital, especially for mothers who experience difficulties and complications giving birth. Both proposals for the site of a new in-patient unit, which I shall discuss shortly, envisage the closure of Bellshill maternity hospital once alternative accommodation becomes available. I would, however, like to take this opportunity to state clearly that the re-provision of in-patient services at another site is in no way a reflection of the dedication of the staff and the quality of care that they provide at Bellshill hospital. The hospital is much respected and admired in the community, and I am grateful to all who work hard there to provide care for mothers in Lanarkshire.

The health board's review has recommended that in-patient maternity services should be centralised in a new unit on a district general hospital site. Two local acute trusts have submitted proposals for the location of the new unit. In considering the proposals, the board has weighed the need to provide the best quality of care possible alongside the need to offer accessible services. Although finely balanced, the health board has expressed a preference to locate the new in-patient unit at the new Law hospital to be built at Netherton, beside Wishaw.

Importantly, in a patient-centred NHS, the board also took into account extensive consultations with mothers in making their decision. The key message from these discussions was that mothers attach greater importance to quality of care during pregnancy and to the facilities

[Lord James Douglas–Hamilton]

available in the maternity unit than to the location of the in-patient unit itself. Of those who expressed a preference as to its location, 38 per cent. preferred Netherton and 33 per cent. preferred Monklands.

For the residents of Monklands, this decision would enable an increased quality of service to be provided. New locally based day care facilities in the Monklands district general hospital care will be available for mothers in the Monklands area, with immediate access to on-site specialists. With in-patient accommodation in the new Law hospital, intensive neonatal and other specialist care would, for the first time, be available on-site for all mothers, with no need to transfer to another site should complications arise.

The hon Lady raised an alternative option of providing in-patient facilities at two sites in Lanarkshire: the new Law hospital at Netherton and Monklands district general hospital. This was a fundamental question addressed by the review. The size of future demand for services is an important consideration. The number of births per year to Lanarkshire mothers is expected to fall by almost 15 per cent. by 2005 to just over 6,600. Of these, around 4,400 will take place in Lanarkshire, reducing the need for local in-patient accommodation to around 80 beds. A single in-patient maternity unit remains the health board's preferred option for strong clinical reasons. There are five reasons, which I shall go through.

First, with two sites, a neonatal intensive care unit for critically ill babies could be provided at only one location, resulting in around 50 per cent. of babies who need that level of care having to be transferred to the hospital with the unit. The advice that I have received is that transference is dangerous if a baby is critically ill. Secondly, with two sites, peaks in demand would result in some women being transferred at short notice to unfamiliar surroundings when their "local" unit was already full. That is unsettling to prospective mothers. Thirdly, two sites would reduce the availability of expert anaesthetic and paediatric staff, since the range of work at each site would be insufficient to attract top specialists. Obviously, anaesthetists and paediatricians of top quality are needed.

Fourthly, the lower activity levels at two sites would not equip staff with sufficient expertise to deal with the range of potential birth complications as effectively. Only with higher activity levels at a single site could that be achieved. That might affect safety and would be a concern in securing continued accreditation from royal colleges and other national bodies. Fifthly, the consequences of having two smaller sites rather than one large one would also impact on recruitment and retention of staff. To develop their professional skills, many staff would be seeking experience in a unit with a greater volume of activity and offering a wider range of experience than could be offered in the two smaller units. For those reasons, the single-site option is preferred by the health board.

I should make it clear that the review of maternity services in Lanarkshire goes much wider than just in-patient care. The board wished to respond to the expressed wishes of mothers for increased community-based antenatal and post-natal care, which we think is extremely important. The board considering whether the 24 antenatal and post-natal clinics sited around Lanarkshire, including six in Monklands, should be increased in number, whether the range of services available at each clinic should be increased, and whether the opening times of clinics should be revised or extended.

In addition, the board intended to build on the concept of day assessment centre services already provided in Bellshill and Law hospitals. It will provide four such centres, including a new centre in Monklands hospital. These centres will be staffed by midwives and will provide a wide range of services locally to avoid the need for women to travel to the in-patient unit if at all possible. The centres will be linked to the hospital day-bed facilities for conditions which do not need the full support of the in-patient unit.

Finally, the board also intends to develop the concept of integrated care. With a unified clinical and organisational structure, each woman will have a named midwife and consultant with a midwifery team to ensure continuity of care from the first contact until after the birth. Importantly, the service will be both personal and local.

I have been impressed by the extent to which local consultations have formed the bedrock of the service review and development of proposals. It is right to acknowledge the efforts of the board to consult as widely as possible and the response from so many interested parties. That has been of assistance. Consultations on the board's proposals are and will be actively pursued, with over 20 public meetings and meetings with professional and other bodies arranged in Lanarkshire. Several of these are being held in Monklands, and I know that the health board will shortly wish to invite the hon. Member for Monklands, East in particular, along with other hon. Members from Lanarkshire, to discuss the proposals.

I am not in a position to anticipate the final outcome of the consultation exercise, or the Secretary of State's decision in relation to the possible closure of Bellshill hospital. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members have put a number of arguments and they will be considered. That is right. Before the papers come to the Secretary of State, every conceivable contingency and possibility should have been properly considered. We are interested only in the provision of better care in the future than in the past.

We are aiming for enhanced antenatal and post-natal clinics and day-care maternity facilities and we want to make certain that a new unit should have intensive care back-up and access to other specialities.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-eight minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 15 October 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES BILL *[Lords]*

Order for consideration read.

Ordered,

That Standing Order 205 (Notice of Third Reading) be suspended and that the Bill be now read the third time.—[*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time on Tuesday 22 October.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authority Housing

1. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to encourage local authorities to transfer their housing stock to alternative landlords. [38350]

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): To date, 52 local authorities have transferred their stock, raising over £3.7 billion of private sector money which has been invested, improving the level of repairs and maintenance in transferred housing. I am therefore encouraging all authorities to follow their example.

Mr. Bruce: I thank my right hon. Friend for those encouraging words. He probably knows that West Dorset, which covers part of my constituency, has benefited from homes being released, thereby becoming a better landlord and keeping rents down and productivity up. Money is also released back into West Dorset to spend on job creation projects. Other councils in my area, however, say that they have to join a list and wait their turn if they want to get into transferring.

Will my right hon. Friend offer more encouragement to ensure that this happens early and to ensure that the Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors who continually try to block progress are prevented from doing so?

Mr. Gummer: I shall certainly be happy to look at any suggestions from the local authorities concerned. I do want to encourage them. They should not use excuses, because the fact is that the money can be used for the benefit of tenants. We can lever in private sector money that would not otherwise be available, and maintenance is thereby much improved.

Mr. Betts: Is not the Secretary of State addressing the wrong issue? It is not housing transfer that concerns tenants most. Most of them want to stay with their local authorities anyway. What worries tenants is the need to build new homes and to improve existing ones. Should not the right hon. Gentleman be ashamed of the fact that the Government have allowed public investment in housing to drop by half since the last general election, at a time when local authorities possess £5 billion in capital receipts which could be used to improve homes and build new ones? Should not the Secretary of State be dealing with that instead of with fanciful notions about the transfer of housing stock?

Mr. Gummer: It is odd, if the hon. Gentleman thinks that, that Sheffield should be one of the first local authorities concerned with the estates renewal challenge fund—which is precisely what we are talking about. Transfer releases capital from the private sector, which enables that capital to be spent. So the tenants who want better maintenance and improved homes get them. Experience in Suffolk Coastal, my area, shows that whereas there used to be many complaints, even about a well run local housing authority, there are now very few complaints because of the improvements that have been achieved. The hon. Gentleman should follow what Manchester has done, and what has been done elsewhere by local authorities that are a little more progressive than he is.

Rough Sleepers Initiative

2. **Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has further to extend the rough sleepers initiative. [38351]

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): I am studying the results of the survey into the extent of rough sleeping outside central London undertaken on behalf of the Government by Shelter and I expect to announce my conclusions shortly.

Mr. Thomason: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the number of people who have been sleeping rough in the centre of London since 1990 and the introduction of the initiative has fallen to about a quarter of the previous figure, according to the independent survey? Does he agree that it is therefore important that the initiative should be extended outside central London as soon as possible?

Mr. Curry: I agree with my hon. Friend, whose interest in the matter is well known. The initiative has been successful in central London and we are investigating the needs of other places which might require such an initiative. In some places, facilities may exist but, for example, the outreach services are not effectively directing people who need those facilities to

them. My announcement on the future of the rough sleepers initiative will cover a range of responses to help people in the direst need.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not a telling commentary on the Government that so many people are sleeping rough? Prior to 1979 and in the late 1960s, I do not remember leaving the House and seeing anyone sleeping rough in Charing Cross or in the Strand. On my way home now, many people are in that desperate situation, and that shows only too well the failure of the Government's housing policy.

Mr. Curry: The fact is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) said, that, according to independent counts—not done by the Government—the numbers have come down significantly. The hon. Gentleman would be foolish indeed if he assumed that all rough sleeping is directly attributable to one cause or another. We are all aware of the fragmentation of society, and the Leader of the Opposition recently devoted a speech to that subject. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the Government should be held responsible, automatically and immediately, for every development in society, he has a bizarre view of government. We are tackling the problems with remarkable success and with the co-operation of the voluntary sector. The hon. Gentleman would do better to pay tribute to those who work hard to help those in the greatest need.

Mr. Brooke: I do not wish to accuse anybody of NIMBYism, and I acknowledge the achievements of the rough sleepers initiative, but does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that friction is increasing at the interface between the solutions to the problems faced by rough sleepers and, in some cases, their behaviour and the residential communities on which those solutions are beginning to impinge? Has he given thought to how that friction might be better lubricated?

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend is correct. It is often difficult to obtain planning permission, for example, for some of the specialist facilities, such as de-tox units, because residents are naturally fearful of the possible effect on the neighbourhood. If we can draw rough sleepers into some framework of care and discipline, that is better for the neighbourhood than if they remain on the street, but it is clear that people who live close to facilities should be invited to visit the facilities and the framework that exists and to give their consent. The changes must be made with the residents, not against them.

Mr. Raynsford: As the Minister is keen to quote figures, may I ask whether he agrees with the conclusions of the recent report of the inquiry into preventing youth homelessness, which was chaired by Andreas Whittam Smith, that some 300,000 youngsters experienced homelessness last year? Does he agree that the spectacle of young people begging and sleeping on the streets of our cities is the most terrible indictment of the failure of the Government's housing policy?

Why, therefore—when he and his Department are trying, through the rough sleepers initiative, to reduce the numbers sleeping rough—do his colleagues in other Departments undermine his efforts? Why is the Secretary of State for Social Security introducing benefit cuts that will leave many more under-25-year-olds sleeping rough because they do not have the means to pay for housing?

Mr. Curry: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that I do not accept the figures of the inquiry chaired by Andreas Whittam Smith, because they are based on a sample survey of single and homeless people taken in 1991, which has been extrapolated to 1995. There is a problem of young homelessness and, indeed, of all sorts and I would like to be able to tackle all those problems, but such figures, which are extrapolated, based on unreliable sources and designed for propaganda purposes, are not helpful. People would be better served if voluntary effort were devoted to helping those in need, rather than to concocting propaganda figures.

Construction Industry

3. **Sir Anthony Durant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his Department's responsibilities in relation to the construction industry. [38352]

The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency (Mr. Robert B. Jones): My Department's role within the Government and the EU is to help sell British construction products and services in the domestic, European and world markets.

Sir Anthony Durant: Does my hon. Friend agree that the recovery in the construction industry is still slow? Will he encourage the private finance initiative, in co-operation with the Department of Health and the Department of Transport, and try to get it moving a little faster?

Mr. Jones: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of the private finance initiative. My right hon. Friend and I have met those in the construction industry several times to discuss issues related to the PFI and, as a result, have encouraged bilaterals with the Departments to which my hon. Friend referred, but not just those Departments, because we must ensure that any obstacles are overcome, whichever Departments are involved.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Does the Minister accept that half a million jobs in the construction industry have been lost over the past six years? How does he justify the Government's policy doing such damage to the industry, when £5 billion of local authority capital receipts are tied up and unusable and there is massive need in the country? Does the Minister accept any responsibility for that?

Mr. Jones: I remember the borrowing binge that the last Labour Government went through, and the massive inflation that did immense damage to the construction industry. We would no doubt have that again if we ever had the misfortune to have another Labour Government.

Sir Michael Neubert: Will my hon. Friend have a word with his colleagues in the Treasury and draw their attention to the part of the construction industry that is carried out on the black economy, to the detriment of fair competition, adequate training skills and general competence, not to mention the Chancellor's cash flow?

Would it not be of great benefit if that illegal activity were reduced, the revenue restored and the prospect of tax cuts for honest taxpayers brought much closer?

Mr. Jones: As my hon. Friend knows, legitimate contractors have considerable interest in trying to tackle the black economy. We have been engaged in discussions through both the Department of the Environment and the Treasury, and are contemplating what steps to take at this very moment.

Business Rates

4. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much tax was paid last year by businesses in excess of the amount which they would have paid had not transitional arrangements been in force for those businesses the values of whose premises were reduced at the time of the most recent valuation. [38353]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): Following the 1995 revaluation, 265,000 businesses saw a reduction in their rates bills in 1995-96. Of that reduction, £1.1 billion was deferred to help cushion the impact of the revaluation on 1.1 million ratepayers who would otherwise have faced substantial increases in their rates bills.

Mr. Rendel: Given the lack of logic behind singling out those whose business values have fallen to pay welcome subsidies to those whose business values have increased, may we assume that the Minister will now persuade the Chancellor of the Exchequer to remove the transitional arrangement for those whose values have fallen before the next general election—presumably in the forthcoming Budget—as happened before the last general election?

Sir Paul Beresford: I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman would refer to the previous rate review, in which the reductions reflected on the businesses in London actually benefited them. In other words, it is swings and roundabouts. Businesses in London and the south-east benefited from the transitional arrangements then, while the reverse is now the case.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend join me in asking the Chancellor in next month's Budget to look at the impact of uniform business rates on small shopkeepers?

Sir Paul Beresford: Certainly, and as a part-time small business man, that matter concerns me as well. It is also of considerable concern to the Department.

Area Cost Adjustment

5. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to implement the recommendations of the independent review into the area cost adjustment. [38354]

Mr. Gummer: In our consultation, all four local government organisations have expressed reservations about implementing this review and have asked for further work. I will consider the representations after my meeting with them tomorrow.

Mr. Lidington: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the independent review endorsed the view expressed by Buckinghamshire county council and other local authorities in the south-east that the area cost adjustment needs to be enhanced rather than reduced? Will he look seriously at implementing the report by the independent review team, especially in the context of the difficulties that we face in Buckinghamshire as a consequence of Milton Keynes becoming a separate unitary authority?

Mr. Gummer: It is unusual for all the local authority associations to express similar reservations, with differing degrees of intensity, about the difficulty of implementing a report. Therefore, I think that it is proper to listen to them carefully. I understand my hon. Friend's view, and the report makes some very important points. However, I do not think that we should rush ahead without hearing what the local authorities have to say.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Is the Secretary of State aware that, under the review's proposals, Cambridgeshire county council would gain by about £10 million this financial year? Does he believe that the Government were justified in imposing a capping limit on Cambridgeshire in its standard spending assessment in the face of that sort of evidence?

Mr. Gummer: All those who would benefit from the proposed changes are very much in favour of them, and all those who would lose from them are very much against them—the fervour increases with the degree of gain or loss. We maintain a fair and reasonable system. Cambridge was warned that, if it sought to gain money from the community outside that system, it would be capped—and capped it was.

Mr. Hendry: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the great concern in Derbyshire and elsewhere about the way in which the current area cost adjustment works? Is he aware also that there is great dismay that the basis of the proposed reforms appears to be fundamentally flawed because the whole range of incomes has not been taken into account, particularly public sector salaries? Will he give an undertaking to take those concerns fully into account before he makes a final judgment about the proposals?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend points to only one of the issues raised by the local authority associations. They are concerned about some of the methodology used. I am determined that any changes we might make would commend themselves to the House as a whole and would remain in place for a reasonable and stable period. In order to do that, I must take into account precisely the points that my hon. Friend has made.

Wildlife Habitats

6. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new proposals he has to improve the provision of habitats for threatened wildlife species. [38355]

Mr. Gummer: Our biodiversity plan is accepted as a world leader. It is based on a programme of targets to conserve endangered species in their habitats.

Ms Quin: While there has been a positive reaction to the publication of biodiversity action plans to save threatened species, such as the red squirrel, is the Secretary of State aware that there is concern that it may not be possible to find the necessary resources, from both public and private sources, to fund those action plans? Will the Secretary of State give a commitment that the plans will not fail due to the lack of a relatively modest level of resources?

Mr. Gummer: I think that the hon. Lady will agree that this biodiversity action plan involves a very direct agreement between Government and the non-governmental organisations which helped to frame it. I have every intention of ensuring that it succeeds. I am committed to protecting those species, and I shall see that that protection is carried through.

Mr. Meacher: In view of the known damage that is caused to wildlife habitats by the excessive and reckless use of certain toxic pesticides leaching into water supplies and contaminating land, will the Secretary of State take steps to restrict or ban the use of the more serious pesticides? In light of the Government's admission that Gulf war syndrome was caused by organophosphate spraying, and in light of official reports in 1951 and 1987 that condemned the use of those highly toxic chemicals in farming—particularly for sheep dipping—will the Secretary of State now ban the use of organophosphates?

Mr. Gummer: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the Front Bench as Opposition spokesman on this subject, but I remind him that his question is entirely one for my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. In the meantime, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not make such general statements about various substances, some of which have done a great deal to enable us to feed people in this country and elsewhere.

Social Housing

7. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to increase the provision of social housing. [38356]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The falling numbers of homeless, of rough sleepers and of households in temporary accommodation, show that we are already meeting need. We are also encouraging effective local authority policies to encourage the most effective use of existing housing stock.

Mr. Heppell: Is the Minister aware that there are 11,500 people on Nottingham city council's waiting list? With the social housing programme at its lowest level since the war, does the hon. Gentleman not think that it is time to allow the council to release its capital receipts of over £40 million to try to boost the housing programme and to put some of the people on the waiting list—many of them elderly or disabled—into decent, affordable housing?

Mr. Jones: Councillors are not sitting with their capital receipts money under the mattress. If we followed the hon. Gentleman's advice, there would be upward pressure on interest rates, extra borrowing and an increase in council tax. Is the hon. Gentleman prepared to come clean about that?

Mr. Batiste: Does my hon. Friend agree that social housing and all other forms of development are best established against a clear local plan? Does he therefore understand the concern that we have in Leeds that, having been through the longest planning inquiry in history and having been promised a report in 1997, we have now been told that it has been deferred to 1999? Will my hon. Friend undertake to look into the reasons for the delay and try to bring forward some certainty in our local planning, both for social housing and for everything else in our city?

Mr. Jones: I fully understand the importance of my hon. Friend's point. If we are to have a plan-led system, we must have up-to-date plans. I am discussing with officials and a wide range of people outside the Department how we might speed up the system in regard to unitary development plans. That being so, my hon. Friend makes his point at a timely moment.

Elected Mayors

8. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the advantages of having elected mayors. [38357]

Mr. Curry: My Department received 600 responses to its consultation on the idea of locally-elected mayors. There were four favourable responses. Not a single London borough; not a single metropolitan council; not a single district council or for that matter a single county council was in favour.

Dr. Wright: Having spent 17 years trying to emasculate local government, could not the Government now take the opportunity to try to rejuvenate it? Why do they set their face against an idea that has the support of more than 70 per cent. of the population, or at least agree to some experiments? The Deputy Prime Minister was once enthusiastic about this idea, but that by itself is surely no reason for the Government to be against it.

Mr. Curry: I have just said that local government is against it. The Government have told local authorities that, if it is an area that they wish to explore, there is no reason why we should be hostile to it. When we consulted local government, it was clear that it was not interested. It was much more interested in the structure of committees. It was more interested, perhaps, in some form of cabinet system for local government. It was also more interested in the idea of a council manager. It was especially interested in councillors' allowances. It was not particularly interested in locally elected mayors.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Could the candidates for mayoralty include those who are in favour of one type of school for their own children and another type for everyone else's?

Mr. Curry: I am sure that the bolt will have gone home, as it always does when it is fired by my hon. Friend.

Unfit Homes

9. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes in England are unfit for human habitation. [38358]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Against the statutory definition the last English house condition survey in 1991 recorded 1.5 million such dwellings. More up-to-date information will be available from the 1996 English house condition survey, which is due to report next year.

Mr. Bennett: Given the increasing need for new accommodation, does the Minister accept that it is extremely important for the Government to make the best use of existing stock? Is he satisfied that there are now sufficient resources to bring unfit dwellings up to date to modern standards?

Mr. Jones: There are many other sources of resources that are not being properly tapped by local authorities. As has been said, we want to encourage local authorities to go for large-scale voluntary transfers, which would release resources for this and other purposes.

Local Authority Dwellings

10. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total number of local authority dwellings at the latest date; and how many were built in the last year. [38359]

Mr. Curry: There were 4.4 million dwellings in the social rented sector at the beginning of April 1995, of which 3.6 million were local authority dwellings. More than 76,000 new social lettings were provided in 1995-6, including 800 in new dwellings built by local authorities. Housing associations are now the main providers of new social housing.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that the most savage indictment of this Government over 17 years is that, in 1978-79, when the Labour Government lost office, local authorities built 78 times more houses than the Government are building at this time? Only a paltry 605 were built for the whole of England and Wales during the course of last year. Old-age pensioners are being shunted from hospitals to community care who should be in warden-controlled accommodation.

When the Prime Minister talks about coming from two-roomed accommodation in Brixton to 10 Downing street, what about all the others, those who have only two rooms in which to live; and what about all those who do not have a roof over their head? It is time that the Government released capital receipts to allow Labour local authorities to build dwellings for the people who badly need them.

Mr. Curry: It is the dwellings that were built by so many Labour local authorities that we are now having to put right by programmes such as estate renewal. The trouble with the hon. Gentleman is that he has learnt absolutely nothing. He knows nothing about housing associations. He knows nothing about private sector investment of £10 billion in the social housing sector. He knows nothing about new opportunities for landlords. He knows nothing about new opportunities through housing companies. He wants none of that. He has learnt nothing and he has forgotten nothing. He is the last Bourbon of Bolsover and has views of no future but a failed past.

Mrs. Peacock: Can my right hon. Friend tell the House how much of the presently retained capital receipts would be available for building if all local authorities paid off their debts?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is right. While local authorities maintain debt, they have to pay interest on it and would have to levy council taxes to do so, or they can use the income from their capital receipts to meet those charges. It is entirely mythical that capital receipts are some bonus that has already been paid before. We are talking about public expenditure, and if it were to be spent, other spending would have to replace it or there would have to be borrowing. If the hon. Member for Bolsover really wants to help authorities that are in the worst situation, it would be much more simple to give credit approvals. That is public expenditure as well. There is no way around it.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Minister confirm that just 605 houses were started by local authorities in England last year? As an example, in the north-west there are 14,000 homeless families, but not one house was started by local authorities in the north-west—not one house in Blackpool, Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale or Manchester. Does he not think that that is a disgrace? Does he not realise that many local authorities have capital receipts? That money should be invested in finding somewhere decent for homeless people.

Mr. Curry: The Labour party is obsessed with capital receipts and is trying to do it with mirrors—*[Interruption.]* The Labour party has said that it is not prepared to redefine the public sector borrowing requirement. The shadow Treasury team has said that. It may be that, occasionally, Governments get caught by their Treasury when they arrive in office, but it is remarkable to be shackled by the Treasury before being anywhere near office.

This is public expenditure, however it is defined, and it is not a disgrace that local authorities are not building many houses, because we do not intend them to. We think that housing associations do the job better, and if we had not moved the emphasis to housing associations, the social housing market would not have received £10 billion in private sector investment since 1988. That is an outstanding record. It is one that I hope other people will emulate. There is no case for continuing local authority build when one can pull private sector money alongside public sector money, as local authorities do by helping housing associations.

Standard Spending Assessments

11. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to revise standard spending assessment formulae to take greater account of the needs of rural areas. [38360]

Sir Paul Beresford: As my hon. Friend is aware, we have commissioned some detailed research on sparsity which shows that there is no need at present for any radical changes to standard spending assessment formulae.

Mr. Greenway: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, but does he agree that it frequently costs more to provide services in rural areas, and that many people living in the countryside do not enjoy the services enjoyed by those who live in towns and cities, such as recreation and leisure facilities and concessionary travel arrangements? When my hon. Friend considers the studies to which he referred, will he please bear in mind those costs on shire district councils and ensure that, if anything, their SSAs go up, not down?

Sir Paul Beresford: My hon. Friend will be interested to know of two other pieces of research. The sparsely populated authorities researched this subject, and their final report concluded that the allowances for sparsity should be at least as great as they are at present. Interestingly, the research for the Association of Metropolitan Authorities argued for lower percentages, and concluded that there was an argument for no sparsity allowances at all.

Mr. William O'Brien: When considering the revision of SSAs in rural areas, will the Minister have regard to the representations made during the past five or six years by authorities in the Webber Craig group for fairness in the allocation of SSAs for education, social services and community care?

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Gentleman makes such a large, kindly and clear plea that I shall certainly take notice of it.

Sir Jim Spicer: My hon. Friend has made it clear that some people do not believe that there is any need for a sparsity factor at all. May I say firmly and clearly that in West Dorset we need that sparsity factor and we would take a poor view if it were withdrawn?

Sir Paul Beresford: As I think I said in my original answer, research shows that there is a need for the sparsity factor, but that no great change is required.

Rented Housing

12. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the current availability of houses for rent. [38361]

Mr. Curry: There are around 4.5 million homes in the social rented sector and more than 2 million privately rented dwellings in England.

Mr. Janner: Does the Minister admit that, since the Conservative party came to power, the number of rented homes in Britain has dropped by more than a million? In his view, does "opportunity for all" include the right of less well-off people to rent decent homes that they can afford, or is it simply the right for people to be homeless during the last cold winter of Tory rule?

Mr. Curry: If the hon. and learned Gentleman follows these matters, he will know that I place great emphasis on the provision of rented accommodation and, in particular, the revival of the private rented sector. That has happened. There are now 2 million homes in that sector. If the hon. and learned Gentleman would care to read *The Observer*, which I suspect is a newspaper read more by Opposition Members than by Conservative Members, he would see that Halifax Mortgage Services, Woolwich Direct, Mortgage Express and Homeloans Direct are now providing mortgages for people to build homes to rent in the private sector. The reason given is that

"the investment climate is now more favourable than in decades. Rent controls have been abolished. Investors are free to charge market prices and can guarantee possession of their properties through assured shorthold tenancies. There is also scope for long-term capital growth."

This Government are doing more to help the private rented sector to get a better balance in housing than any previous Government. The hon. and learned Gentleman, who voted against the right to buy and does not like private rented accommodation, is stuck in the old mindset that the only house worth having is a council-built property. That is not true.

Mr. Dunn: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that many thousands of local authority houses are now standing empty, and have stood empty for years in Labour-controlled local authorities, and that we should not forget that, if there are housing black spots in Britain, the Labour party is responsible for creating them?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is correct. Basic good management is an essential element in housing: collecting the rents; when tenants leave, getting new tenants in rapidly; and ensuring that repairs are carried out on time. That is an important element. There are also many empty properties in the private sector. It is important that those 600,000 or so properties are brought into use. There is no excuse for such an asset lying idle, whoever owns it.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister not recognise that the thousands of people throughout Britain who are on waiting lists to rent houses do not believe a single word he says? They cannot understand why council house waiting lists are longer than in 1979 and why many councils have had to go back to a points system which they abolished many years ago.

Mr. Curry: What is understood is that, where houses have been transferred to a housing association, the satisfaction level expressed by the tenant is always high. We need a better balance in housing, which the Housing Act 1996 will achieve. We also need to mobilise private sector resources to go alongside the public sector to deliver social housing. With £10 billion in that respect in the past few years, we are achieving it.

Playing Fields and Derelict Land

13. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy on the use of (a) playing fields and (b) derelict land for housing and other construction; and if he will make a statement. [38362]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We want to make the best use of derelict sites for housing and other development. We also want to protect playing fields because of their vital contribution to health and to the quality of life. Our planning policies are designed to do both those things. Since August, any proposal to develop on a playing field must be referred to the Sports Council for England, as statutory consultee, to ensure that local planning authorities are aware of any deficiency in playing field provision before making any decisions.

Mr. Greenway: I thank my hon. Friend for his excellent action in saving the GWR playing fields in west Ealing in my constituency from development for housing by British Rail, and contrast that with the Ealing Labour council's strenuous attempts to build houses on Dormers Wells high school playing fields, until the council was stopped from doing so by the Government. May I support his admirable policies of building on derelict land, which is obviously more suitable than playing fields?

Mr. Jones: In his usual telling way, my hon. Friend makes the point that it is only the Conservative party that cares about the environment.

Mr. Tony Banks: How much derelict land is owned by the Government?

Mr. Jones: Too much derelict land is owned by all owners of property in Britain, and it is incumbent not just on the Government but on local authorities, public institutions and private owners to try to get that land developed.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that local councils such as my own in Wyre should be encouraged to develop land in urban areas, particularly derelict land, and not develop open fields on the edges of towns? Will he ensure that in future local plans reflect that need?

Mr. Jones: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend. Given the great demographic challenges to which we must face up, the key way of trying to ensure that houses are provided is to ensure that they are on already used land. It is depressing that, when we are trying to encourage a return to central towns and cities, the Labour party spokesman on these issues, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), is busy all the time promising developers that there will be a turning back from the encouragement to go into the centres.

Forestry

14. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding the environmental benefits of forestry. [38364]

Mr. Gummer: Representations have been very large—both in number and in variety.

Mrs. Jackson: Is the Secretary of State not aware of the huge concerns in community forests, especially those in urban regions such as South Yorkshire, about the huge threat that the landfill tax poses to forests because of the increase in illegal dumping? Is he aware that that, added to the fact that only 7 per cent. of forest sold since 1991 has had public access agreements—which is disgraceful—means that the public will be denied the proper enjoyment of public access woodland?

Mr. Gummer: The landfill tax has been welcomed by almost every environmental organisation in Britain and has set an example for the rest of Europe and the world. The hon. Lady shows again that the Labour party does not care two hoots about the environment, and will use every method to attack the Government's progressive environmental policies.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, at 7 per cent., forest cover in England is the lowest in Europe, and that forest plantings have halved since the late 1980s? I suggest that that is not consistent with the rural White Paper, where the Government's intention was to double the rate of forestry cover within the next 50 years. Are there further measures which my right hon. Friend can take to encourage the planting rate, which will have an economic and environmental impact?

Mr. Gummer: This is the first Government to make a commitment to double the area of forest cover. I am determined to achieve that, but we need to do so in a way that does not cause a financial ramp, which was a feature of the previous system. We must find a sensible way to increase forest cover.

Ms Ruddock: Has the Secretary of State no shame? Is it not an indictment of his so-called green credentials that, in the past five years, only 7 per cent. of the forestry land that has been sold off has had public access guaranteed? Is it not a fact that, in raising millions of pounds, he has colluded with his right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to promise relief on inheritance tax for the few while denying the many their natural inheritance of access to our beautiful countryside?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Lady is wrong as usual, but it is nice to hear her talk about the environment, as no one on the Opposition Benches does so at any time. The Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), has made only one speech on the environment in two and a half years, so little does he care about it.

The hon. Lady is wrong, because woods that are used by the public are not sold off. Arrangements are always made for continued public access to areas where such access has been important; so she should not only talk about the environment more frequently but get her facts right.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 15 October. [38380]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Campbell: As a fellow working class warrior—I will take my coat off—will the Prime Minister confirm that he sent his children to a private school?

The Prime Minister: I believe in choice. I do not seek to deny choice to other people.

Q2. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 15 October. [38381]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Congdon: Which party controls the council with the worst GCSE results in England? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will take tough measures to tackle failing schools, rather than spouting about the family from thousands of miles away?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure which authority it is, but I know that the authorities with the poorest records are all run by the Labour party. That is undoubtedly true. As my hon. Friend intimated, we have now taken powers to deal with failing schools, and, when necessary, we shall use those powers.

Mr. Blair: Does the Prime Minister agree that the spate of reports of crisis in the national health service, culminating in a hospital refusing even emergency referrals of elderly patients because of a shortage of beds, are a disgrace? Will he accept the judgment of the head of the British Medical Association that that crisis is directly due to the Conservative Government's internal market reforms, which have undermined the health service?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not accept that for a second—nor do a large number of people in the health service up and down the country. I advise the right hon. Gentleman to travel up and down the country within the health service, where he will see in hospitals and in primary health care services the advantages that the reforms have brought about and will continue to bring about in the future. In particular, he may care to look at some of the group general practices that I have visited recently.

Mr. Blair: What I am putting to the Prime Minister is precisely the view of the doctors and nurses who work in the national health service. Perhaps he will confirm that, since he became Prime Minister, there have been 20,000 more senior managers and 50,000 fewer nurses. Since he became Prime Minister, in London alone there have been 2,500 fewer acute beds, and half the casualty departments in London have closed. When even doctors and nurses with a lifetime's experience in the health service say that that is due to the Government's internal market reforms, can the Prime Minister not see the fundamental damage that those reforms are doing to the very principles of the national health service?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. If he wishes to test whether the reforms are working, I offer him the one that was suggested by the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) when he was shadow Health Secretary: he said that the acid test was whether more patients were being treated. More patients are being treated; patient waiting lists have fallen; 1.5 million more patients are being treated than before the reforms; health expenditure has risen and been provided for by the Government; there are more doctors and more dentists; and waiting times have decreased dramatically. That is a health service providing a wider and better service. I very much regret that the right hon. Gentleman cherry-picks in order to criticise the health service when he should be supporting it.

Mr. Blair: I notice that the right hon. Gentleman did not dispute a single word I said. Furthermore, I do not know how he dare mention dentistry in the national health service after what his Government have done to it. He asked me to talk to those who work in the NHS. Does he recall what the chair of the consultants committee of the BMA said, just in the past few days? He said:

"I fear the hospital service will be close to collapse this winter."

Do not people know from their experience that waiting lists are getting longer, people are still lying for hours on end on trolleys in casualty departments, acute beds are scarcer and staff and nurse morale is lower? The right hon. Gentleman simply washes his hands of it. If that is the experience—[HON. MEMBERS: No."] This is the experience of people in the Tory national health service. If that is their experience, is it any wonder that people today know that the Tories cannot ever be trusted on the national health service?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman knows that most of what he has just said about the health service is completely misleading and, in many parts, totally inaccurate. Waiting lists are falling. Since 1979, the health service has had the largest sustained building programme of any stage in its history. There are more doctors—that is a matter of fact. There are more dentists—that is a matter of fact. There are more nurses and midwives—that is a matter of fact. I regret very much that he chooses to run down a service that the people who use it know from experience is a better service, which is improving day after day. Treatments that were never before available are provided more speedily and are improving. That is a record in the health service of which we can be proud. Unlike his party, we have not cut building and nurses' pay.

Q3. **Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 15 October. [38382]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Banks: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the tremendous news announced today by Vauxhall at its plant in Ellesmere Port in north-west England of £300 million-worth of new investment and 200 jobs? Does he agree that that not only is good news but will create a raft of new opportunities for the region—opportunities that would not be there if a minimum wage and the social chapter were thrust on us?

The Prime Minister: Today's announcement is certainly more good news on top of a range of inward investment in different parts of the country that has brought a great deal of hope and employment to many parts of the United Kingdom. If we continue to pursue the same policies in future, I believe that we shall continue to attract very large-scale inward investment, partly using the United Kingdom as the base for operations in Europe and beyond, which I very much welcome. That will be lost if we follow the wrong policies. If Labour Members are so certain that the minimum wage will cause no harm, perhaps they will tell us what the minimum wage level will be, so that a judgment may be made.

Mr. Ashdown: May I ask the Prime Minister a simple question of general principle? Is it right for a Government to seek to interfere in or manipulate the outcome of a Select Committee of Parliament?

The Prime Minister: As you, Madam Speaker, said yesterday, allegations ought not to be bandied across the House. If the right hon. Gentleman has a complaint, he should put it to the appropriate Committee, and he will see that there is no one in this House more concerned than I am that it should be properly examined.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Would the Prime Minister care to confirm to the House a statement that he made in a letter to me on 1 October? The letter stated:

"The Coronation Oath is indeed regarded as a solemn undertaking by the Sovereign which is binding throughout Her reign. Ministers would not advise Her Majesty to sign into law any provision which contradicted Her Oath."

The Prime Minister: I can certainly confirm that that is my view of the Coronation oath.

Q5. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 15 October. [38384]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McAllion: On the day the FTSE index of the top 100 UK companies soared to record new levels, will the Prime Minister spare a thought for the 12,000 Scottish teenagers and under-25s every year who register as homeless? Will he remember that they are but the tip of an iceberg that spreads throughout Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom? Will he resolve at least to stop preaching at them about decency, duty and responsibility, and instead begin to show a scrap of decency—a modicum of the duty and responsibility that his Government owe to them—by guaranteeing each and every one of them their human right to a decent and safe home to live in?

The Prime Minister: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman thinks that an extra level of taxation in Scotland would help those people—I very much doubt it. Throughout the past 17 years, we have followed policies that will widen opportunity for people, whatever strata of society they may be in and whatever their personal circumstances may be. That is the policy that we have followed. It is the policy in which I believe, and it is the policy that we shall continue to follow.

Mr. Alexander: Has my right hon. Friend seen recent examples of the way in which female victims are sometimes treated in court, particularly where sexual offences are alleged? Did he read of the cases in which one young lady was cross-examined for six hours by her rapist and another was cross-examined for 12 days by lawyers acting for six defendants? Should it not be a matter of urgency that court proceedings are reformed to spare female victims that cruelty?

The Prime Minister: I think that there will be a great deal of sympathy for what my hon. Friend said. Certainly, the case in which the lady was cross-examined by the accused rapist struck deeply with many people throughout the country. I agree that it is something that we should examine.

Q6. **Mr. Brian David Jenkins:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 15 October. [38385]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Jenkins: Does the Prime Minister agree that the price review announced today by the Director General of Water Services shows that the Labour party was right all along and that consumers have been ripped off for years under weak regulation, weak government and weak leadership?

The Prime Minister: The simple answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is no. It shows the Labour party to have been wrong all along. If the industries had remained in public ownership, we would not have had any regulator looking at price reductions, we would not have had a better service, and we would not have had the extra investment. We would still have had the massive amount of taxpayer subsidy to inefficient industries.

Sir Donald Thompson: Will my right hon. Friend disregard the London-based bleat of the Leader of the Opposition and come to my constituency, where he will find the best health service in Europe at all levels, as my postbag proves, week after week?

The Prime Minister: I believe that my hon. Friend speaks not only for himself and for his constituents but for the many millions of people who use the NHS each year and who know from their own experiences how well they have been treated in it.

Q7. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 15 October. [38386]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Martlew: Does the Prime Minister agree that, if we are to have a high-speed rail link on the west coast main line—with all its environmental advantages, including a reduction in road congestion, and with all the advantages for the western part of the British Isles—there will be a need for public money to upgrade that line? If so, have the Government given any consideration to this matter?

The Prime Minister: We have put a great deal of public money into a number of rail lines—*[Interruption.]* I suggest that, if Opposition Members do not understand that, they go to look at the new services. I suggest that they also examine the extra investment after the privatisation of British Rail—a privatisation that they said could not be done, should not be done and would not be done. The fact is that it has been done, and that it is a great success. Investment is up, and the service is improving.

Primary Care

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the Government's proposals for the development of primary health care services.

The Government have always accorded a high priority to the development of NHS primary care. The last 17 years have seen substantial extra resources flow into the primary care sector, and those resources have allowed general practitioners to extend the range of care provided within their surgeries. More GPs are working within the NHS, employing more nurses and therapists, and there has been an unprecedented investment programme in GP surgery buildings. There has been a continued steady growth of NHS dentistry, and a greater recognition of the role of pharmacists in the delivery of health care.

The development of GP fundholding has also changed the relationship between primary and secondary care, and has allowed GPs—both fundholders and non-fundholders—to use their knowledge of their patients' needs to improve the efficiency and responsiveness of NHS care. From next April, 58 per cent. of the population will be covered by a fundholding GP.

Despite this record of achievement, however, there remain areas of weakness that need to be addressed. Some inner-city areas have not fully benefited from the development of NHS primary care, and many have argued that the statutory framework for the delivery of primary care is now holding back some desirable service developments.

Against that background, I asked my hon. Friend the Minister for Health to enter into consultations with patient groups and the primary care professions, and with others interested in the future of primary care, to develop proposals that will allow the continued development of NHS primary care.

The conclusions of my hon. Friend's consultations were set out in the Government's document "Primary Care—The Future", which was published this June. Similar discussions were held in Scotland and Wales, and similar conclusions were reached. The Government are committed to address the full range of issues set out in that document, and we will make a full response to them around the turn of the year.

One of the key conclusions of my hon. Friend the Minister for Health's consultations, however, concerned the need to encourage local flexibility in the delivery of primary care services. This conclusion matches the conclusion of the Government's 1994 Green Paper "Improving NHS Dentistry".

Therefore, the Government are today publishing a White Paper entitled "Choice and Opportunity" that sets out our proposals for changing NHS legislation to allow greater flexibility in the delivery of NHS primary health care. We intend to introduce a Bill covering these changes at the earliest opportunity.

The proposals do not envisage a new blueprint for NHS primary care. Our approach will be to enable NHS practitioners and local health authorities to develop new ways in which to deliver and improve primary care. Participation will be voluntary, and practitioners who wish to do so will be able to continue to practise under existing arrangements.

In the case of general medical and dental practitioners, the legislation envisaged in the White Paper will allow practitioners and health authorities to propose pilots to test the practical implications of different types of contract. For GPs, these might include practice-based contracts, recognising the important part which nurses and therapists play within the primary health care team. Alternatively, they may involve GPs working as salaried employees, freeing them from the task of running a practice to concentrate on clinical work.

For GP practices that do not wish to pilot new forms of contract, but seek ways of developing services within the existing contractual framework, our proposals will provide health authorities and boards with greater freedom to reward GPs who offer an enhanced service to their patients.

Dentists will also have the opportunity to pilot new approaches to the delivery of care. These might include local contracts to provide greater incentives for offering treatment in areas of greatest need; new ways of ensuring accessibility to services; or contracts for groups of practices.

If pilots are successful, it will be possible to implement more widely the approaches that have been tested in this way. But we must be sure that, in testing new approaches, we do not lose the best of the existing arrangements. Pilots will be monitored and the results will be evaluated.

One principle will be inviolate. Services provided by practitioners in any pilot approved under this legislation will be provided on NHS terms. Family doctor services will remain free at the point of use. Dental services will be subject to the same charging regime as other general dental practitioner services. Patients will retain the same registration rights as at present.

My hon. Friend the Minister's consultations highlighted the potential for community pharmacists to play a greater part in encouraging the better use of medicines, giving advice to the public and health promotion. The White Paper sets out proposals to remove the legal restrictions that prevent health authorities and boards from rewarding community pharmacists who provide a higher standard of service to their patients.

The legislation will also introduce greater flexibility for health authorities and boards in purchasing community pharmacy and optometry services, and resolve an anomaly which prevents NHS community pharmacies from providing certain services for patients who live just over the border in a neighbouring health authority or board area. The proposals will not affect dispensing services and patients will still have the right to take NHS prescriptions to the community pharmacy of their choice.

Finally, the legislation will address a long-standing problem with the appointment of GPs to practices by implementing the recommendation in the chief medical officer's report "Maintaining Medical Excellence" that appointments to single-handed practices should be made only where at least one candidate meets the standards set out in the job description.

Our primary care system is the envy of the world. These proposals support and build on that success story. There is no single template; our aim is to provide choice and opportunity for those GPs and dentists who want to develop and improve services to pilot their ideas. All our proposals rely on the commitment and enthusiasm of

[Mr. Stephen Dorrell]

health care professionals who have played a leading part in their development. We look forward to continuing to work closely with them as we take forward this agenda.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I welcome some of the specific proposals in the White Paper. Everyone will welcome the removal of the requirement to make an appointment to a single-handed practice, no matter how bad the applicant, and will be astonished that it has taken so long to put that absurdity right.

We welcome the Secretary of State's rediscovery of the importance of cottage and community hospitals and the particular role that they can play in helping patients to recover from major surgery. Will he therefore explain why the Government have closed 245 such hospitals in the past five years? We welcome the proposals for salaried GPs employed, for example, by NHS community trusts, and particularly those proposals to help to solve the acute problem of GP recruitment in inner city areas.

I also welcome the Secretary of State's sudden and apparent conversion to the vital principle of equity in the NHS. In appendix A of the White Paper he writes:

"It will be important not to create inequity of resources for patients of different practices."

I quite agree. Where, then, has he been these past five years when so many of the changes made by the Government have quite deliberately created inequity in the NHS? Does he now realise that the creation of two tiers of service for patients is unacceptable in a comprehensive national service? Does the Secretary of State accept what Derek Smith, chairman of King's Healthcare, said on 25 July—that a two-tier health service is now "an everyday reality"? How can the Secretary of State have woken up so belatedly to the reality of what is happening in the delivery of health care?

In relation to dentistry, paragraph 4.7 of the White Paper says:

"patients should continue to have a right to choose the dental practitioner from whom to receive dental treatment".

Does the Secretary of State not recognise, however, that for many people national health service dentistry has in a very real sense ceased to exist altogether? Does not this reveal that what he is doing in much of the document is starting to repair some of the damage that the Government have caused in the first place? It is a bit like an arsonist saying sorry and starting to rebuild the very house that he has destroyed. Is not the whole document an admission that single practice fundholding is not necessarily the panacea that the Government have always claimed it to be?

Does the Secretary of State realise that, this afternoon, the Government have for the first time recognised that GP commissioning is happening and is providing real benefits to GPs and patients alike? Will he now embrace Labour party policy on GP commissioning as the way forward?

One proposal in the document fills Opposition Members with particular alarm. Paragraph 2.4 talks of

"a salaried option for GPs, either within partnerships or with other bodies".

Paragraph 8 of appendix A states:

"Ordinary contracts would be used when services were provided outside the NHS".

Does not that reveal that the Government's real agenda is allowing primary care GP services to be provided by private commercial companies? Would not the proposal tear at the very roots of the public service ethos of general practice?

The GP service, with its fierce independent professionalism, has been the foundation stone of the NHS for 50 years. The relationship between GP and patient has been uniquely important for the British health system, but that relationship will be fundamentally undermined if GPs are employed and their services provided by private sector companies ranging from pharmaceuticals to supermarkets. The professional integrity of the GP must be sustained and the Government's proposal puts it at risk.

We applaud the Secretary of State's conversion to the cause of equity, to the importance of cottage hospitals, to the need to solve the problems of the inner cities and to the value of GP commissioning, but I urge him to think again before he goes down the road to a privatised commercialised GP service. Opposition Members want none of it.

Mr. Dorrell: I begin by welcoming the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities. I believe that in an earlier brief he was told to think the unthinkable. I am not sure that he was regarded as a great success there; I hope that he will prove to be a more flexible thinker about health policy.

The hon. Gentleman asked me first about equity of resources. Listening to him, it was hard to remember that it was this Government who introduced the weighted capitation system, precisely to ensure that the historically inequitable distribution of resources as between one part of the country and another was remedied. It is this Government who, every year since the implementation of the reformed health service management structure, have moved the funding of the health service closer to the targets provided by that weighted capitation formula.

So I do not accept for one moment the idea that we have not, consistently and in practice, been interested in dealing equitably with the resources of the health service, directing them to the areas of greatest health need. Indeed, this was one of the very subjects that my hon. Friend the Minister for Health discussed in the primary care listening exercise: to ensure that resources in the primary care world flowed in a more equitable direction. That was one of the principal objectives of the more flexible management system that I have described and which we are committed to introducing.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me about cottage hospitals. Of course it is true that hospitals in various parts of the country will open and close facilities. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman can quote examples of certain hospitals closing when they come to the end of their useful lives. But there are not many Health Secretaries who can report to the House that they have been to Devonshire, or anywhere else, and opened two brand new hospitals on the same day. That is exactly what I did earlier this year.

The Government have been developing new community hospitals, and the fundholding scheme, which the hon. Gentleman loves to hate, has been one of the most effective mechanisms for reopening and underpinning the viability of cottage and community hospitals in the national health service.

That brings me to the principle of GP choice: the choice exercised by the general practitioner as to the best model of care to meet the needs of his or her patients. That is the principle on which this document is based. We look for new ways of delivering high-quality primary care which reflect the ideas of those who have to deliver that care.

The hon. Gentleman's party likes to espouse this cause, but then immediately makes it clear that it would remove from the table the one option that has been chosen by GPs serving 58 per cent. of the patients of this country—namely, the fundholding scheme. How can the hon. Gentleman deploy rhetoric in favour of GP choice while at the same time supporting the abolition of the fundholding scheme that has been chosen by a majority of the GPs of Britain?

Finally, the hon. Gentleman likes to raise the Aunt Sally of privatisation. I made it crystal clear in my statement that I am talking about producing a different way of delivering NHS primary care on the same terms as NHS primary care is currently available—the same charging regime for dentistry, free in general practice. Interestingly, the hon. Gentleman this afternoon avoided the simple proposition that the whole of NHS primary care since Nye Bevan's original NHS Act 1946 has been delivered by private contractors responding to contracts with the national health service—

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Independent.

Mr. Dorrell: Not all independent. The pharmacist Boots is a profit-making company—

Mr. Morgan: Not private.

Mr. Dorrell: I was under the illusion that it was private. Boots delivers a key NHS service as an NHS pharmacy. It is a contractor delivering an NHS service. So the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) is completely wrong to say that these proposals would let the private sector into NHS primary care for the first time. Ironically, the proposals would let trusts, the public sector, into NHS primary care for the first time. Until now, NHS primary care has been the exclusive preserve of private contractors delivering an NHS service in response to an NHS contract. I want to make that contracting regime more flexible, the better to meet the needs of patients.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Did my right hon. Friend notice an historic, perhaps even unique, event on the radio this morning, when the chairman of the British Medical Association gave his full backing to the White Paper? Is not that a first and does not it make complete nonsense of much of what was said by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith)?

Can my right hon. Friend be a little more specific about the services he envisages will be provided by optometrists? He said that he wants shared care and an extension of services for patients.

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. She is right to say that it is unusual, if not unique, for me to appear on the "Today" programme alongside Dr. Sandy Macara and receive his unqualified blessing for my proposals, as I did this morning. I am pleased to say that his support is reflected not just by the British Medical Association but by the British Dental Association and the other professional groups that my hon. Friend the Minister for Health consulted.

The purpose of my hon. Friend's exercise was to develop a consensus in the professions about how primary care can best develop. That was reflected in the document that we published in June and it underlies the legislative proposals that I have announced this afternoon. It would be nice if those on the Opposition Front Bench shared in the consensus with those who are responsible for delivering services to patients.

As for the role of optometrists, there will be major opportunities to integrate optometrists more effectively into the primary care team; to consider the relationship between optometrists and general practitioners to ensure a proper flow of information; and to consider the arrangements for referral from optometry to the secondary care services. Those are the options for the development of optometry in integrated NHS primary health care and we shall cover them in more detail later this year in the document to which I have referred.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Of course I join the Secretary of State in wanting a higher quality and more accessible health service that is tailored to the needs of different communities. That would be a good step forward. There are, however, differences of view between him, some of his colleagues and people in and outside the House about whether all is right with the health service at the moment, and the changes that are needed.

I ask the Secretary of State for five simple assurances. Can we have the resources that it is objectively agreed the health service needs? Can we have the additional staffing that is regarded as necessary even by independent pay review bodies? Can we have some national co-ordination, which does not currently exist? Given the announcement today in particular, can we have an assurance that the new primary care system will be free from commercial profit-making at the expense of the health service? Can we be assured that companies, whether Tesco or Asda, Tarmac or Wimpey, will not be able to employ people in the health service and make profits for the private sector at the expense of patients?

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North–East): What about Boots?

Mr. Hughes: Not Boots, which is a drug company that deals with pharmacists; I mean any company that could employ GPs.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman raises a huge range of issues that I cannot deal with in any substance in an answer to a question. We shall continue to ensure that the staffing is available to deliver the kind of service we describe. I must point out, as the Prime Minister did a few moments ago, that we have seen a huge growth in NHS staffing since 1979—*[Interruption.]*—in clinical staffing, and we have also seen a huge increase in the resources available to the health service, including £4.8 billion over and above inflation in this Parliament alone. Staffing and resources continue to be key concerns of any Health Secretary, as does proper co-ordination.

[Mr. Dorrell]

The hon. Gentleman seems to believe, somehow, in a pure service with no profit motive, which is the only sort that he conceives can be of benefit to patients. Life is much more complex than that. Boots delivers an NHS service: the NHS pharmacy service. Boots and every other NHS pharmacist deliver that service for a profit. The independent contractors who deliver NHS general practice also do it for a living—that is to say, for a profit. Drug companies that sell drugs through the dispensing service do it for a profit. I am interested in a proper reward for those who deliver an efficient, high-quality service for the patient. Provided that I am satisfied that those tests are passed, I am willing to consider proposals made with the support of the professional staff concerned.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The last hon. Member who put a question asked five questions. That is totally unfair, but I allowed him to do so because he speaks for his party on these matters. That was the only reason. Given the number of hon. Members who seek to put questions on this statement, I cannot be fair and call them if we have long questions and long answers. I am sure that the House will oblige: I want brisk questions and brisk answers.

Sir Roger Sims (Chislehurst): As my right hon. Friend will realise, an increasing role will need to be played by nurses, particularly district nurses, health visitors and practice nurses. It is now four years since Parliament approved legislation to enable nurses to prescribe yet we are still waiting for the evaluation of the first pilot sites. Will my right hon. Friend give more priority to nurse prescribing and expedite its implementation?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is on to an important point. Some real benefits can be secured through the extension of nurse prescribing provided that it is done in a properly evaluated and disciplined way. The Government are committed to that process. The practice-based contract concept—one of the specific objectives of this legislation is to allow that concept to be developed—will allow broader scope for nurses to deliver primary care services, subject to proper medical oversight. That will allow the development of the independent professional nursing practice that my hon. Friend seeks. It is an attractive option, but it must be introduced in a properly disciplined and controlled way.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): The Secretary of State sought to reassure the House that the Government provide for a fair and equitable distribution of NHS resources through their capitation funding formula, but he has forgotten that that funding formula applies to hospitals, not to primary care, which is the subject of this statement. Is he aware that present funding for Cornwall health authority provides enough money for one GP for every 1,660 people in Cornwall, while the funding for Rotherham provides only for one GP for every 2,250 people? What will he do to distribute primary health care money equitably? If he does not distribute it equitably, all his proposals for buying in care from salaried doctors will mean nothing, because the purchasers of care will not have the money to do it.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman clearly was not listening to what I said. I specifically said that the extension of the weighted capitation basis of funding to primary care was one of the issues that my hon. Friend the Minister for Health raised in the listening exercise and is one of the issues that we are working on.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): Will my right hon. Friend confirm the vital importance of GP fundholding to primary care? Is he aware that Bury has one of the largest numbers of fundholders in the country? When I meet those fundholders next month, may I confirm that the reports in the press about a change in Labour party policy are totally untrue, and that the Labour party remains committed to abolishing fundholding and all the services that it provides? In the unlikely event of a Labour Government, that step would do great damage to my constituents.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend may be interested to know that today I was given a document entitled "The Labour Party Policy Handbook 1996"—dateline October 1996. My hon. Friend will be interested to hear that it is in loose-leaf format, so clearly a certain flexibility is intended. With that caveat, the document—it was published within the last 14 days, so it is hot off the press—says that it is Labour party policy to replace fundholding with GP commissioning. I understand the word "replace" to mean that one thing will take the place of another—in other words, fundholding will be abolished. Every GP fundholder, servicing 58 per cent. of patients in this country, should take that into account as we approach the election. The Labour party would abolish fundholding—the option that has been chosen as being in the interests of 58 per cent. of patients.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Will the Secretary of State assure us that the worrying closures of community pharmacies will cease? Is he aware that pharmacies fear the abolition of retail price maintenance and that I have received many petitions about the matter? Supermarkets can close community pharmacies.

Mr. Dorrell: The question of retail price maintenance falls outside the specific responsibility of the Department of Health, and I do not accept that its abolition has inevitable consequences for the viability of the pharmacy network.

I am committed to the development of NHS pharmacy as a key element of primary health care. One simple statistic makes that clear: 3 million people go to pharmacists every day for some kind of health or health-related product. It is a key element in the primary health care team and in the delivery of an integrated national health service in Britain.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid–Kent): I am at least as great a supporter of the purchaser-provider split as Dr. Sandy Macara, but my right hon. Friend may be aware that in west Kent we are suffering badly as a result of the purchasing authority's failure to control the over-expenditure of fundholding GPs. That is seriously damaging the morale of non-fundholding GPs and provider trusts, which are performing extremely well. Will my right hon. Friend give a commitment to investigate how that situation may be improved in future, and how we may mitigate the damage done so far?

Mr. Dorrell: I shall certainly look at the position in Kent, as my hon. Friend has suggested. The responsibility

to live within a fundholder's budget rests primarily with the fundholder rather than with the health authority. If there is a problem with over-spending fundholders in my hon. Friend's constituency, the principal responsibility for addressing it rests with the fundholders. However, I shall examine that issue.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I welcome the Government's much-needed U-turn on community hospitals. Does the Secretary of State agree that every town of any size should have a proper, modern community hospital, that that will be facilitated and that the private finance initiative, which has held back many community hospital schemes, will not be used in that way any longer? Local authorities should be allowed to proceed without going down that delaying route.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on both counts. The PFI does not hold back community and cottage hospitals: it is the means by which community and cottage hospital projects may go ahead, if there is demand in the area, without having to wait for the capital flow to be approved by the Department of Health and the collective processes of Government.

As to the hon. Gentleman's allegation that this is a U-turn, the most powerful weapon for re-establishing and expanding support for community and cottage hospitals in Britain is the GP fundholding scheme that the Government introduced in 1991. Fundholders, acting on behalf of their patients, have made it clear that they want local community hospitals and are prepared to be involved in the management of medical cover within those hospitals in order to ensure more local care delivery to their patients. That approach is dead right, and I am happy to endorse it.

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): My right hon. Friend will be aware that I practised as a physician in the national health service for a number of years. However, he may not be aware that I was on the receiving end of NHS services for much of the recess and thus was able to do a good deal of consumer research. Apart from the superb accident and emergency and in-patient treatment that I received, the most profound and agreeable aspect of my treatment—

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Private.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: NHS, and it always has been for every member of my family. There was superb liaison between GPs, district and community nurses and pharmacists—it could not be better. Is that not an example of Conservative policies raising the level of service for the benefit of the whole community?

Mr. Dorrell: I am pleased to welcome my hon. Friend back from whatever problem he encountered. He is a clear example of the NHS having worked successfully. I am pleased also to be able to congratulate him on his recovery. His experience—the service he received—is the experience of the huge majority of NHS patients. People regularly say, "I have been lucky." But people who receive high-quality care from the NHS are not lucky; it is the overwhelming experience of the majority of NHS patients.

I am pleased to join my hon. Friend in recording the fact that the care delivered by today's practitioners and professional staff within the NHS is without historical parallel. It is better than it has ever been. It is the Government's determination that it should continue to get better. We shall continue to give those within the NHS the tools to ensure that that happens.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that there is a clear distinction between those who have treatment in the NHS and praise the nurses and the doctors for helping them to get well, and those who take a political stance in the knowledge that, after 17 years of Tory rule, NHS staff are fed up with the way in which the Government are ruining the health service?

Is it not true that most cottage hospitals have been turned into private nursing homes to be run by friends of the Tory party? It is a licence to print money. There are more beds in private nursing homes than there are in the entire NHS. Will the right hon. Gentleman deny that?

Mr. Dorrell: It is certainly true that we have seen a huge growth in the number of care beds for the elderly in private nursing and residential homes. We know that 80 per cent. of them are supported by public funds. There is a delivery of quality care to elderly people which was undreamed of 20 years ago. The hon. Gentleman should talk to the staff of the NHS. He will find that the huge majority of them are proud of the service that they deliver. Of course they want to deliver more service, but they recognise that the service that they have been delivering has been developing and growing and treating more patients year by year since 1979. They deliver and they know that it is a growing service.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Having had to use the services of a non-fundholding practice during the summer recess on two occasions, may I vouch for the excellent quality and speed of service that such practices provide? Having visited a community pharmacy at its request to see the valuable job that it does, may I endorse what has been said about the vital part that such pharmacies play in the community?

To pick up the point of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) about the problems that they will encounter as a result of the activities of the superstores—may I say that I have managed to obtain the services of a salaried dentist for my constituency, there having been inadequate NHS dentistry?—I can vouch for the flexibility of the NHS, which appears to be the main feature of my right hon. Friend's statement. Am I right in saying that the Government have pledged to spend more on the NHS above the rate of inflation for every year that we Conservatives are in government after the next election?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right in almost everything that he has said. In particular, he is right to say that we are committed to continue to support a growing and more flexible health service. As he rightly said, flexibility is the main purport of the proposals that I have announced this afternoon.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I endorse the comments about community pharmacies, which want to play a bigger role. The Minister has said, "if pilots are successful". He has said also that they will be monitored and

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

"the results will be evaluated."

Is that an admission that, at an earlier stage of reform of the NHS, pilot studies were not evaluated and that we went down the road of reform far too fast without having the facts before us? Is a plea being made for more certainty on this occasion?

Mr. Dorrell: When we introduced pilot fundholding in the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, a number of general practitioners who saw the fundholding scheme in operation decided that they wanted to join it. They saw how they could deliver best care to their patients. That was their evidence. The numbers have grown, and now 58 per cent. of patients are covered by the fundholding scheme. I regard pilot fundholding as having succeeded.

The majority of GPs now want to apply the scheme to the benefit of their patients. I have set out in my statement the way in which we intend to pilot a range of different contracting models to ascertain which ones best deliver the claims made for them. What we shall probably find, I suspect, is that some will work in some areas and others will work in other areas and people will learn by the experience of having piloted them.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend congratulate GP fundholders, such as Dr. Brian Golden in my constituency, who have used the opportunities presented by fundholding to perform many more minor operations in the surgery rather than the hospital; who have widened the number of clinics on offer; and who have substantially reduced waiting lists? Is this not the sort of progress that most people welcome, even if the Opposition want to get rid of it?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right on every count. Fundholding has been a huge success. That is not to undermine the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton)—that there are plenty of high-quality GPs who choose not to be fundholders.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): What about the 42 per cent?

Mr. Dorrell: I was just talking about them, if the hon. Gentleman will contain himself in silence for a moment.

There are non-fundholding GPs who also deliver high-quality service—that is perfectly true—but fundholders have been at the cutting edge of the changes in the relationship between primary and secondary care, and some of them have delivered stunning improvements in the quality of care that they deliver to their patients.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Does the Secretary of State agree that one service that GPs need to retain is the right to send patients to the hospital of their choice? What will he do about the right and the choice of GPs who want to send their patients to the Hillingdon hospital trust if they happen to be over 75 years of age? What choice will GPs in Halifax have to send patients to the new hospital when it is built and the number of beds is reduced from 850 to 500? Will that be a cut-off point based on age?

Mr. Dorrell: The position in Hillingdon is that the patients who are being talked about are those who live in the environs of Mount Vernon hospital, for whom there is an elderly assessment unit at that hospital. If local GPs want to shift the resources and the service from Mount Vernon to Hillingdon, that is something that they can negotiate, but it does not make much sense to provide the facility at Mount Vernon and send the patients to Hillingdon. That is the proposition that we are asked to endorse this afternoon, and frankly it seems to me to be pretty silly.

In terms of GP choice, the best way for a GP to ensure that he or she can refer his or her patients to the hospital of choice is by becoming a fundholder, because a fundholder is free to place the contract with whichever hospital they choose. If a GP is not a fundholder, every health authority is under an obligation to discuss with its GPs where facilities are provided. On other occasions, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury is very fond of pointing out that there is a range of different models for consulting GPs, between the health authority and GPs, which have grown up throughout the country and are not fundholding. Fundholding gives the doctor the right to decide all these other models, which the hon. Gentleman quite rightly on other occasions—

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady cannot just dismiss them, because all her friends on the Labour Front Bench like to talk these schemes up. There seems to be a bit of a muddle about what Labour policy is. These commissioning schemes allow GPs to be consultees, whereas fundholding allows them to decide it for themselves.

Mr. Congdon: May I welcome the extra flexibility that the White Paper provides for community pharmacists, whether they make a profit or whether they are Boots? Does my right hon. Friend agree that community pharmacists often provide a valuable service to people whether or not they have recently visited their local GP? Will he consider further measures to extend the range of drugs that pharmacists can dispense without prescription?

Mr. Dorrell: As my hon. Friend knows, that matter is subject to constant review. It is important that drugs that do not need, from a medical safety point of view, the control of prescription access should not be on that list when they do not need to be. That is subject to regular review, but I am sure that my hon. Friend would not wish those decisions to be made on anything other than medical safety grounds.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Is it not unfortunate that a significant proportion of resources provided by health authorities are now based on deficit and debt? Is the Minister aware that his departmental answer to me of 22 July refused to provide figures showing the degree of NHS debt on the basis that they were not suitable for publication? He has not, as he knows, replied to my letter on that subject of 31 July. Will he be present himself in the House tomorrow evening to answer an Adjournment debate on both those particulars of failure?

Mr. Dorrell: I cannot undertake to be present in the House to respond to the debate, but I shall undertake to ensure that I know what will be said before it is said.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): What proposals are contained in the White Paper for tackling the drugs

crisis now gripping much of Britain, including our inner cities, particularly with regard to the national provision of drug treatment centres and guidance to GPs and pharmacies to prescribe methadone, thereby reducing hard drug dependency?

Mr. Dorrell: The range of services provided to people suffering from drug abuse is subject to national monitoring and some national guidance in terms of protocols and the kind of services which are most effective. Evidence is collected nationally, but it is far better that the service should be designed locally. The more flexible contracting regime which will be delivered by the proposals may well have a significant role in ensuring that we are better able to meet the needs of the type of patient whom the hon. Gentleman describes.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): What new money goes with these proposals? It is all very well for the Secretary of State to tell us that he will legislate as soon as possible, but what new money, not in the health service already, will accompany the proposals, which clearly depend upon adequate resources?

Mr. Dorrell: I have not come to make an announcement about money this afternoon; I have come to make an announcement about proposals for legislative change. But if the Government's record is anything to go by, it will be a lot more than £100 million.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): The announcement has some welcome aspects, but initiatives in primary care are unlikely to be effective if they are grafted on to a system of contracting that encourages short-term thinking when already too many community services do not know what they are doing from one year to the next. Will the Secretary of State review the time scales of contracts so that we have proper commissioning rather than short-term fixing year on year?

With regard to money, may I press the right hon. Gentleman on one specific issue? Appendix A refers to money for the pilots being ring-fenced. Is that new money and, whether or not it is, how much will be ring-fenced?

Mr. Dorrell: It is not new money and does not need to be new money, because we are talking about the delivery of primary care services to existing patients with existing practitioners. We are talking about ring-fencing the existing pool system for the remuneration of doctors and dentists so that the individual doctor and dentist does not have his remuneration undermined or distorted by the development of the pilots. That is what ring-fencing means in that context.

The hon. Gentleman repeats the assertion that the Government are in favour of short-term annual contracts. We have said repeatedly, and I said it again in May this year when I published some material on improving the efficiency of NHS bureaucracy, that I am in favour of a medium-term perspective in the contracts. I certainly am not in favour of an artificial requirement that every contract should be placed for one year. That never has been the Government's policy, however often it is asserted from the Opposition Benches that it is.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): What advice does the Secretary of State have for GPs who are concerned that there is a shortage of acute beds in hospitals for the mentally ill, particularly in the Wakefield area, where the Secretary of State knows that the amalgamation of two hospitals will reduce the number of acute beds?

Mr. Dorrell: I have repeatedly made it clear, and it is being delivered by the NHS, that we need to deliver acute hospital beds for those who are acutely mentally ill, just as we need to deliver acute hospital beds for those who are acutely physically ill. I am not in favour of continuing to provide many long-stay isolated mental illness beds in traditional mental illness hospitals when better models of care are available which provide proper support in the community, nursing home support for people who need nursing homes and a range of other facilities, but, where people need acute mental illness beds, those are being provided, often in acute mental illness units that have been the result of the investment boom of which the Prime Minister spoke when answering questions earlier.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): The Secretary of State has said that he praised fundholders, but in our region we have evidence of fundholders refusing to put old people on their practice lists. In fact, they are not even refusing them. They are throwing them off the list and other doctors who are not fundholders are having to pick them up. That is not good enough, and will the Secretary of State do something about it?

Mr. Dorrell: If the hon. Gentleman made that accusation with a name attached to it outside the House, it would be a serious charge of professional misconduct.

Mr. Campbell: I will bring the case to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman should indeed bring the case to me, because, if he does so, he will find it referred to the General Medical Council for unethical conduct.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is my right hon. Friend aware that my local district general hospital, the Lancaster royal infirmary, will shortly be the first hospital to incorporate a dedicated blood transfusion service? Will he consider doing us the honour of opening it?

Mr. Dorrell: I should be delighted to respond to an invitation that my hon. Friend presses on me and I hope that it will be possible to fit it into my schedule.

Madam Speaker: That was not referred to in the statement that I heard.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Will the Secretary of State take the opportunity to apologise to the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people in Britain who are deprived of primary dental care? In my constituency, a small group in the town of Milford Haven have had to band together and hire a mini-van to transport themselves 30 miles to a dentist who will treat them. That is not uncommon throughout rural Wales. Will the Secretary of State give us an assurance that his measures in the White Paper will deal with that major problem—in one constituency in north Wales, there is no NHS dentist at

[Mr. Nick Ainger]

all—and that we can return to the position 10 years ago when, in my constituency, every dentist was providing NHS care, whereas now we have only three?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield says that he already has a salaried dentist in his constituency. The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) asks that we return to the position of 10 or perhaps 17 years ago. He would like to return to the position 17 years ago in NHS dentistry. That would mean a reduction of roughly one third in the number of NHS courses of dental treatment delivered.

Mr. Ainger *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Dorrell: It is no good the hon. Gentleman shaking his head. Adult courses of dentistry received and paid for in NHS terms have risen from 17 million in 1979 to just short of 25 million in 1995. That is an increase in NHS dentistry activity of 46 per cent. It is an inconvenient fact, given the sort of assertions that the hon. Gentleman likes to make. I would not argue—I do not argue—that there are no problems in NHS dentistry. That is why we are introducing the proposals to make the system more flexible, but the hon. Gentleman should not assert that NHS dentistry is in retreat—

Mr. Ainger: It is.

Mr. Dorrell: It is no good saying that it is. I have quoted the facts to the hon. Gentleman. The facts are that there were 17 million courses of treatment in the time that he referred to as a golden age and that there are 25 million courses of treatment now.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): I do not know where the Secretary of State gets his facts, but many of my constituents cannot get an NHS dentist because the NHS dentists have pulled out and gone private. How will the White Paper help those constituents? Is not this word "choice", which Ministers utter, an increasingly empty word that means the Hobson's choice of going without because, in practice, NHS dentistry has been privatised?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. I have shown clearly that it is not true to say that NHS dentistry is being privatised. I acknowledge that there are problems with the provision of NHS dentistry, which is why we have introduced these proposals to make the regime under which NHS dentistry is provided more flexible and to allow health authorities to target resources on areas where there is a problem with access.

Earlier this year, my hon. Friend the Minister for Health announced changes in the remuneration of dentists under the present contractual arrangements. Resources will be targeted specifically on dental services for children to ensure that that provision receives priority. We are responding to problems of access to NHS dentistry as they arise. My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield referred to another example of how that is being done.

Neither of the assertions of the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) is true. It is not true to say that NHS dentistry is a service in retreat. It is true to say that there are some problems, but we are dealing with them.

Madam Speaker's Statement

4.24 pm

Madam Speaker: I have a statement to make on a matter of privilege. The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) has written to me about information that came to light during the parliamentary recess alleging that, in 1994, improper pressure was brought to bear on the Select Committee on Members' Interests. I am satisfied that the matter should have the precedence accorded to matters of privilege. The hon. Member is thus entitled to table a motion for consideration by the House as its first business tomorrow at 3.30 pm.

Class Size (Reduction)

4.25 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to reduce the numbers of children taught in classes in schools.

My Bill would set a limit of no more than 30 children in any class in any school within the next five years. It would review ways of achieving smaller classes for children who have special educational needs—physical or psychological—or who are learning English as a second language or who have very low attainment levels.

Why is the Bill needed? According to official figures, 40 per cent. of primary school age children in England are being taught in classes of more than 30, and the percentage is worsening. In January 1995, 1.6 million primary school children were in classes of more than 30, which is a 7 per cent. increase on the previous year and a 24 per cent. increase since 1991. The number of classes with more than 40 children has risen even faster—27 per cent. in the year to January 1995—to 18,000. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy says:

"average class sizes in primary schools are rapidly increasing."

Primary class sizes in England are now among the least favourable in OECD countries, and the gap is getting wider.

There are 400,000 secondary school pupils in classes of more than 30. Class sizes are rising in that sector too. Since the mid-1980s, secondary schools have lost more than one in five of their mathematics and English teachers. *The Observer* of 1 Sept this year noted that despite the fact that the school age population is set to rise this year by 100,000, the Department for Education and Employment plans to recruit only 85 more teachers. Each year since 1992, the intake of new primary school teachers has fallen. There is a shortfall of 2,000 teachers in the secondary sector if the Government's own targets are to be met, so there is a looming crisis in mathematics, science and English teaching.

The Department for Education and Employment continues to claim that there is no teacher shortage and refuses to acknowledge the effect of class sizes on children's attainment. Meanwhile, more than one third of 14-year-olds are not mastering basic mathematics, English or science, and one in six adults has severe difficulty with literacy and numeracy.

The evidence shows the advantage of smaller class sizes. Despite the Government's refusal to sponsor detailed research studies, several such studies have been undertaken which clearly show that the smaller the class size the better the performance of pupils. STAR, the student-teacher ratio project in Tennessee, found that

"pupils in small classes consistently out performed pupils in larger classes"

and that

"children from deprived backgrounds benefited the most from learning in this environment."

Mortimore and Blatchford concluded that smaller classes led to greater progress in reading and mathematics for eight-year-olds. They said that the results of smaller classes were "impressive and consistent". There appears to be particular advantage for pupils from ethnic minorities. In addition, the benefits are long-lasting.

Studies show that schoolchildren taught in smaller classes were still benefiting at the age of 12. Mortimore and Blatchford state that, in direct contradiction to Ministers' pronouncements that class sizes are unimportant, it can justifiably be said that it is incorrect to state that there is no proven connection between class size and attainment.

Ofsted's report, "Class Size and the Quality of Education", in November last year said:

"small class sizes are of benefit in the early years of primary education."

It added:

"pupils with special needs frequently make greater progress when they are taught in smaller classes."

Ofsted maintained that teaching methods were more important for attainment than class sizes, but Maurice Galton, writing in the *Educational Review* in the summer, made clear that the two are linked. He said:

"Challenging high levels of interaction, involving in particular challenging questioning and feedback, are crucial determinants of pupil progress."

High levels of interaction can be best achieved in smaller classes.

The National Commission on Education's report, "Learning to Succeed", said that, within five years, no primary school child should be in a class of more than 30. The National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations supports a class size limit of 30. Private schools have pupil-teacher ratios of 10:6. They clearly regard low class sizes as important. There is much evidence to support the need for low class sizes.

What would be the cost of my proposal? Based on the recent survey by the National Foundation for Educational Research, 6,000 more teachers would be needed to cover 39,385 classes. That would cost £156 million. The assisted places scheme will cost £161 million by 1998. By phasing that scheme out over five years, all class sizes could be reduced to a maximum of 30 in the same period. To quote the slogan of the Tory party conference, that would mean opportunity for all. Alternatively, the cost could be met by reducing wasteful spending in other Ministries.

Ofsted has suggested that reducing class sizes would cost an enormous sum—more than £500 million. It included in its calculation large extra transport costs and additional accommodation requirements. Such costs have not been incurred as class sizes have risen, so why should they be taken into account when numbers fall to earlier class size ratios? Ofsted's figures are a crude and unsubstantiated guesstimate. They are much less worked out than those of the National Foundation for Educational Research, which stands by its calculations.

There has been virtually no detailed research in the past decade into relevant class sizes in secondary schools. Most studies have concentrated on primary teaching. Although I acknowledge that that sector is vital for imparting learning skills, smaller class sizes would also benefit secondary school pupils. There is a widespread assumption of failure; that many in the secondary sector are already lost to education. That assumption should not be accepted. There are fewer large classes in secondary schools than there are in primary schools, so the cost of achieving the 30 limit in the secondary sector would be low. Education strategies concentrate on early schooling

[Mr. Harry Cohen]

and better training after leaving school. Ensuring low class sizes would fill the gap by improving learning in secondary schools, too.

I turn to the Labour party's commitment. While the Government are letting class sizes rise inexorably, claiming that it does not matter, the Labour party is pledging as a manifesto commitment to bring class sizes down to 30 for five, six and seven-year-olds. That commitment is important and most welcome, but I consider it too cautious. It would not cover all primary or any secondary school pupils. Like my Labour party colleagues, I want to take forward the debate on better education. Much of the brouhaha over teaching methods is a smokescreen. That is not to say that such methods are unimportant—they are. However, they are also a cover-up for cost reduction. They are used to avoid consideration of the consequences of rising class sizes.

Most teachers are working longer hours —in primary schools two hours a week, and in secondary schools 1.4 hours a week longer than two years ago. Many teachers have been sacked or replaced by less experienced, less costly ones due to Government education cuts. Exclusions have soared: in 1993-94 there were 11,181. Greater pressure on teachers as a result of less controllable, larger classes is a factor in that.

There has also been a chronic lack of investment in school buildings and books. Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools recently reported that 3,700 schools do not have enough books. Last year, investment in buildings amounted to only £69 per pupil in state schools—it was £551 per pupil in private schools. In addition to those factors, larger class sizes is a key indicator of the extent of this Conservative Government's neglect of our schools. Rising class sizes is both a symptom and a cause of the crisis in our schools. My Bill attempts to stop the rot.

4.35 pm

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): I oppose the Bill, but not because my hon. Friends and I are against smaller class sizes in schools—far from it. The Government have an excellent record on reducing class sizes—indeed, class sizes are now smaller than they were when this Conservative Government were first elected.

My concern about the Bill proposed by the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) is that it is a red herring—or, perhaps in the hon. Gentleman's case, a very old Labour herring. The Bill does not tackle what is the largest problem in our schools and what should be even the hon. Gentleman's first priority—the quality of education provided for pupils. The Bill will not improve the excellence of the teaching, or the results achieved by students. Class size has little influence on those, as has been confirmed many times by Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools. Proof of that is easily found in other countries. In Japan, class sizes for mathematics are generally much larger than in our schools, yet pupil attainment is better in all age groups in Japanese schools than in England.

Although reducing class sizes is desirable, it should not be the first priority, which is to raise standards in our schools. Teacher training and parental choice are much more important in achieving that. The hon. Member for Leyton proposes paying for smaller class sizes by using the money currently used for the assisted places scheme. I know that the hon. Gentleman does not like that scheme, even though it increases parental choice and gives opportunities to children from less well-off families who will benefit from the sort of education the independent sector can provide. However, the hon. Gentleman is also mistaken in his sums.

If the assisted places scheme were done away with, the pupils currently benefiting from it would have to be found places in the state sector. That, in itself, would push up class sizes in the short term. In addition, providing those extra school places would cost more than three quarters of the money saved by the abolition of assisted places. The remaining quarter—which, by the most generous estimate, would amount only to some £60 million by the time the Bill came into effect—would not be sufficient to fund the reduction in class sizes. As the hon. Member for Leyton admitted, he has overlooked the additional cost of providing new classrooms, which would add greatly to the overall bill.

A more realistic estimate of the cost of reducing class sizes in the way the hon. Member for Leyton proposes would be £180 million—three times the Labour party's figure. The hon. Gentleman's proposal, far from being self-financing, would require well in excess of £120 million to be raised from the taxpayer to pay for it.

Another reason why I oppose the Bill is that I wish to save the hon. Member for Leyton from himself. All hon. Members are very fond of the hon. Gentleman, but if he goes around proposing tax increases—as he clearly did in his speech—he will draw down on himself the wrath of the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). No hon. Member could bear the painful sight of the hon. Member for Leyton being disciplined by the shadow Chancellor. For that reason, if for no other, I urge him not to proceed with his Bill. His many friends on this side of the House fear for his safety if he does proceed with it.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. Harry Barnes, Mr. Roger Berry, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Mike Gapes, Ms Mildred Gordon, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Mr. Ken Livingstone, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Peter L. Pike, Mr. Gerry Steinberg and Mr. David Winnick.

CLASS SIZE (REDUCTION)

Mr. Harry Cohen accordingly presented a Bill to reduce the numbers of children taught in classes in schools: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 189.]

DEFENCE ESTIMATES

[SECOND DAY]

[Relevant document: The Seventh Report from the Defence Committee of Session 1995-96, entitled 'Statement on the Defence Estimates 1996', House of Commons Paper No. 215.]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on amendment to Question [14 October]:

That this House approves the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1996 contained in Cm. 3223.

Which amendment was: to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'declines to support the policy of the Government as set out in the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1996; condemns the instability caused to Britain's armed forces by Government mismanagement; recognises that the UK defence industry is a strategic national asset in both defence and economic terms; notes that the shortfall in the strength of the British Army numbers 4000 personnel; is concerned that the resulting overstretch is undermining the morale and operational effectiveness of the armed forces; condemns the manner in which the defence forces and defence industry are being run down in an ad hoc and piecemeal way; recognises that the armed forces and defence industry require a long-term strategic overview which can only be achieved through the establishment of a strategic defence review; condemns the continued financial waste and mismanagement by Ministers; urges the Government to take action to address the world landmine crisis and to ban the export, import and transfer of all forms of anti-personnel landmine; urges a positive approach to the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty negotiations; and congratulates the work carried out by British forces in the defence of Britain and her interests in helping to maintain international stability in peacekeeping operations throughout the world'—*[Dr. David Clark.]*

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

4.40 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot): It is an honour for me to continue this debate on the "Statement on the Defence Estimates". Before I do so, I am very pleased to be able to tell the House that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has today announced that Her Majesty the Queen has approved the appointment of General Sir Charles Guthrie as Chief of the Defence Staff, in succession to Field Marshall Sir Peter Inge, in April 1997.

As the Government's principal military adviser, the post of Chief of the Defence Staff requires an individual with personal qualities and abilities of the highest order. As he has demonstrated throughout his long and distinguished career, General Guthrie has enormous ability, admirable personal skills and a tremendous record of service experience and leadership, and is much admired throughout the armed forces. I am sure that the whole House will want to join me in congratulating General Guthrie and in wishing him well when he takes up this appointment.

In his opening speech yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence stressed the importance of our continuing drive to achieve value for money in defence, concentrating resources on the front line, and of our support for the front line. Today's armed forces face new challenges. We are in an era when, as the late Manfred Woerner once said:

"We have less threat, but less peace."

More than ever, the services must be extremely flexible and very resilient, with highly capable equipment.

The major investment in equipment made by the Government means that our forces have never been better equipped to meet that challenge. Already in service is equipment such as the Sandown single role minehunter, and such equipment is a world leader in its class. The AS90 self-propelled gun is another world leader, and the Harrier family of aircraft is still the most potent of its type in existence. The decisions that we have made in the past 18 months will add enormously to our ability to deploy our forces flexibly and with great power across the range of scenarios that they may have to face in the future.

We are fully committed to maintaining the worldwide reputation of our services for professionalism and excellence. The quality of our people is undoubted, and, wherever they serve, their skills are acknowledged by allies and by new partners in central and eastern Europe. I pay tribute to all the men and women who serve in our armed forces—whether in the tragic ruins of what was once Yugoslavia, the windswept landscape of the Falkland Islands, the heat of the Gulf or the streets of Northern Ireland. They require and deserve no less than the best equipment that can be provided to meet their needs.

That policy allows them not only to perform the demanding tasks we require of them efficiently and effectively, but can mean the difference between life and death. It is because of the importance that we attach to the equipping of our forces that I wish to devote this speech to our procurement policies and to the vision we have for procurement in the future.

Since the early 1980s, we have seen a revolution in our procurement practices. Chief among those was the adoption of an aggressive competition policy, placing contracts on the basis of best overall value for money. That policy has benefited the taxpayer, the services and, in world markets, British industry. Reviewing those initiatives in its report "Procurement in the 90s", the National Audit Office concluded that our systems were

"essentially sound and compare well with defence organisations overseas".

The House will be aware that, earlier this year, we responded positively to the report entitled "Aspects of Defence Procurement and Industrial Policy" by a joint Select Committee on defence and trade and industry matters. In parallel, my Department carried out its own review of its procurement policies. At the heart of our study was a concern that the unbridled pursuit of competition without regard to the supplier base might, over time, threaten both the capacity and the capability of the UK defence industry.

It is self-evident that, if we are to continue to benefit from our competition policy, we have a vested interest in ensuring that our supplier base is efficient, effective and capable of meeting our needs—not only in the short but in the longer term.

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): The Ministry of Defence has given a contract to Racal for radar, and there has been a great deal of disappointment not only in my constituency but in the Lothians generally. That is particularly true because GEC Marconi, through its purchase of Ferranti, has been the leader in radar

[Mr. Eric Clarke]

equipment for Her Majesty's forces. Is it possible that Racal got the contract because it gave money to the Conservative party?

Mr. Arbuthnot: Although I recognise the hon. Gentleman's stalwart work on behalf of his constituency, I am a bit disappointed that he mentions the treatment of a distinguished defence company in that manner. He implies that those who advise the Ministry of Defence are no more capable of distinguishing proper from improper behaviour than he suggests Ministers are. That is an unworthy suggestion, although I do not think that it is one that he would normally make. I hope that he will reconsider it.

We concluded that value for money should remain the cornerstone of UK procurement policy, and we concluded that competition was critical to the achievement of that objective. We are committed to the benefits of competition, unlike the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar). After his speech last night, I am particularly pleased, and a bit surprised, to see him in the House today.

Competition has inspired innovative design and manufacturing change, driven down prices and improved the performance of defence equipment. By encouraging industry to be more efficient, competition has enhanced the competitiveness of UK industry abroad and has contributed significantly to sales success in foreign markets. In itself, that is a positive contribution to sustaining our defence industrial capabilities.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Has the Ministry of Defence any plans to order replacement vessels for that section of the fleet that is, by and large, concerned with fishery protection duties? Does not the Minister agree that the crews of those vessels perform sterling work, but that in some instances they are crewing aging vessels?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point. I should like to write to him in detail. That would be a more satisfactory way of responding than answering off the cuff.

We also concluded that we should give more systematic consideration to defence industrial factors in reaching future procurement decisions. We have always taken industrial factors into account in our procurement processes, but we concluded that we needed a more systematic approach, defining more explicitly the criteria against which we assess the benefit of seeking to retain defence industrial capability. We have carried that work forward with the Department of Trade and Industry in recent months, and the equipment announcements made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in July are testimony to the extent to which we have embraced that approach.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Is not the Minister saying that, with their new definition of interest, the Government are recognising at last that the market cannot rule on defence procurement, not only because Governments are the major purchasers, but because British industry and much of European industry would otherwise be swamped by competition from the United States?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I said that we had always taken industrial factors into account, but that we needed to do so more systematically. Before the hon. Gentleman attacks the benefits and consequences of market forces too strongly, perhaps he ought to clear his remarks with his own Front Benchers, and with the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson).

Our approach, along with our continued pursuit of the more commercial procurement policies which have proved so successful in past, will ensure that we can provide our armed forces with capable equipment which represents real value for money. However, we are never complacent, and our procurement practices continue to evolve.

For example, we spend some £1 billion a year on high-volume, low-value items—mainly spare parts—with a large number of firms. That carries a disproportionately large administrative cost compared with the value of the items. We are therefore changing the purchasing process to cut out much of the paper-driven bureaucracy. In particular, in line with best practice in industry, we shall introduce electronic data interchange to handle all the activities between ordering and bill payment.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Before my hon. Friend moves away from the subject of the procurement of sophisticated equipment, I should like to remind him that, 20 years ago, it was decided that three shipbuilders—Vickers, Cammell Laird and Vosper Thorneycroft—should be designated warship builders. In recent years, we have come dangerously near the point at which only one shipbuilder is available. The contract for Fearless and Intrepid was dealt with on a NAPNOC—no acceptable price, no contract—basis. Does my hon. Friend have a view on the ideal number of shipbuilders which should be available to undertake large, sophisticated shipbuilding?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am pleased to say that we continue to have a good, competitive shipbuilding market in this country. My hon. Friend implies that the award of the type 23 frigate order to Yarrow may undermine competition in our shipbuilding market. We do not consider that to be true. We have every confidence that Vosper Thornycroft, for example, will continue to be a strong and vibrant shipbuilder able to offer competition into the next millennium. That is why it is part of the consortium to produce the common new generation frigate. I am sure that my hon. Friend will regard that as good news for his constituency and for the interests of defence.

We obviously need to work closely with industry to ensure that we can exchange and share data to our mutual benefit. That will help the introduction of new initiatives such as concurrent engineering on programmes, for which we are seeking to cut the time scales in our procurement process without increasing the risks to the Ministry of Defence.

Over the past year, the Ministry has been working with the Confederation of British Industry to formulate guidelines on how a system of partnering might work in Ministry of Defence procurement, allowing both sides to respond to change, to benefit from innovation, to minimise costs and to maximise service development.

We shall also test all capital expenditure against the framework of the private finance initiative. We do not have no-go areas, and no minimum level of expenditure is set. Inevitably, not all projects will be suitable for the PFI approach, but the Government and industry are interested in exploring options. Deals covered by the initiative worth more than £200 million have already been signed, and £2 billion-worth of further projects is being considered.

The world strategic situation has changed beyond recognition in recent years, and no less is true of the defence industry. Defence remains big business, but defence expenditure cannot support all the manufacturing capacity or jobs that it once did. Industry has had to adapt to a much reduced global market for its products. It must compete ever more vigorously to survive, with new players in the international market seeking the same goals.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Before the Minister leaves the issue of the global market, I should like to ask whether he intends to say anything about the policy on land mines. Does he recognise that General Sir Hugh Beach made a powerful case to the all-party land mine group that any mines exported should be of the detectable type, not the relatively undetectable mines which anaesthetise huge areas of agricultural land in the poorest countries of the world?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I agree that mines should be detectable. We should like any land mines which continue to exist to be of the self-destructing sort, so that they do not pose the dangers to civilian populations which we have seen throughout the world. That is one reason why we have been in the forefront in providing money—nearly £20 million—for the clearance of land mines throughout the world. It is also why we have embraced the concept of abolishing all land mines.

There is a balance to be drawn between the protection of our forces and the protection of civilian populations throughout the world. We do not believe that civilian populations are at risk from the responsible use of land mines, such as that practised by our forces, but we believe that the benefits of a global ban on land mines—if that can be achieved—outweigh the benefits of land mines in the protection of our forces. We very much hope to find an alternative solution to the protection of our forces in the near future.

Yesterday, the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) said that British industry was underperforming. I could hardly believe my ears, but then he said it again. He was quite wrong. British industries have restructured to meet the challenges that I have set out, often doing so before their European counterparts. Our companies are now in a competitive position, reporting growing order books, reducing overheads and healthy profits.

Much of that is due to their own laudable efforts, but I believe that some of the impetus has come from the competitive rigour, so deplored by the hon. Member for Warley, West, of our domestic procurement approach. I cannot pretend that the process has been painless. Many jobs have been lost as companies have adjusted to changing markets. That is regrettable, but I believe that the industry's future is now much more secure. It has reduced capacity without sacrificing significant capability or profitability.

That reduction in capacity—but not in capability—has often been associated with mergers and acquisitions. That has been less marked in Europe than in the United States, where there has been major restructuring, with the creation of giant corporations such as Lockheed Martin International, which has combined sales worth more than £20 billion. In Europe, the defence industrial scene is far more fragmented, but the rationalisation process is now starting to transcend national frontiers with acquisitions and joint ventures. We welcome that, where the results are sensible commercial alliances across national boundaries. Notable examples include GEC's joint venture with Matra on satellites, GEC-Thomson on sonar and Dowty-Messier on landing gear. These arrangements reflect the commercial recognition that the domestic markets of single European countries are simply not big enough to sustain major companies into the next century.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Does my hon. Friend agree that commercial interests are best served by demonstrations by our armed services of safe and competent usage of equipment? On that basis, does he agree that there must be an element of RAF low-level flying in Scotland, where we probably take more than our fair share? Does he also agree that RAF air traffic control services must be kept at a high level? Will he join me in commending the safe operation of the Scottish airways by the RAF air traffic controllers at Prestwick?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of preserving low flying, a capability that can be preserved only with actual practice. I also agree with him about the professionalism of both the military and civilian air traffic controllers. I take my hat off to them for the way in which they perform their stressful job. The safety of our airways must be—and will remain—paramount.

UK industry is now well placed to make a full contribution to the rationalisation—

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): Before the Minister leaves the subject of air traffic control, will he answer the question posed yesterday on the subject by my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), who unfortunately cannot be here because he is at a Western European Union meeting? My hon. Friend asked about the privatisation of the national air traffic control service and the attitude of the Ministry of Defence towards it. Will the Minister also answer the question that I hoped was going to be asked by the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), about the maintenance of the facility at Prestwick?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State answered that question yesterday, and I have nothing to add to what he said then.

UK industry is now well placed to make a full contribution to the rationalisation within Europe—and indeed elsewhere—that will undoubtedly occur in the coming years. There will be scope for some transatlantic rationalisation and the development of strategic partnerships. The Rolls-Royce acquisition of Allison engines and the British Aerospace collaboration with McDonnell-Douglas are cases in point. In the short term, however, major opportunities lie across European

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boundaries. The relative scale of US and European companies does not lend itself easily to a partnership of equals.

There is no escaping the fact that United States expenditure on new equipment, spares and ammunition is more than double that of all the European NATO countries, and seven out of the top 10 defence companies in the world are American. If Europe is to meet this challenge, rationalisation of the industrial base across the continent is essential. My right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) yesterday referred to this, and I hope to answer some of his questions in what I am about to say.

The House will have heard that the Government believe that it is for industry to make commercial decisions about future markets and industrial partnerships. We do not want the Government to decide industry's future on its behalf. What we can, and should, do is provide the climate and the opportunities in which such linkages can succeed. As I have mentioned, we must recognise and take account of the industrial consequences of the procurement decisions that we make.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Have the Minister today—and the Secretary of State yesterday—in effect announced a new policy?

Mr. Arbuthnot: No.

All this means that we must accept an increased level of mutual dependency in meeting procurement needs by agreeing joint requirements. Defence co-operation is no longer just a political option, but an economic necessity. We have many good examples of previous and current co-operative programmes, but we now need to build on these to create structures and processes that offer value for money, while helping rationalisation of the industrial base.

We have made it clear that the adoption of a more commercial approach to future co-operative programmes and their supporting structures is essential. We need to avoid wasteful practices that only serve to distort the market and reduce the economic benefits to be derived. In the past, the obvious benefits of collaboration—increased standardisation, inter-operability, shared development costs, longer production runs and reduced unit costs—have been diluted by working practices contrary to the needs of efficiency and effectiveness.

In future, we should procure from the most efficient supplier—not the one who happens to make up that element of any particular country's work share based on an anticipated level of investment in the project. We cannot subsidise unnecessary duplication of facilities to satisfy purely national, rather than economic, needs. We want taut commercial management, with responsibility for the co-ordination and delivery of the programme to time and cost vested in a single prime contractor. We do not want—we cannot afford—the overhead expenses of large multinational project offices. We need lean organisations, with no international duplication of staffing.

It is against that background that the UK has been contributing positively and constructively to the creation of a European armaments agency that offers the potential for achieving the sort of efficiency improvements and administrative savings that we should all desire. However, we are still some way from its realisation. In answer to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), my remarks today are drawing together some points that have not been drawn together in the same place. It is important that I do that.

We believe that, where nations can agree to common requirements and procurement policies and practices on individual projects—or, indeed, classes of equipment—they should do so. The plans of France and Germany to create a joint armaments framework offer a new channel for a worthwhile and meaningful co-operation in policy and practice. We are working with them—and the Italians—to bring this to fruition.

Some hon. Members may be concerned that, in the creation of a European defence armaments agency, or the quadrilateral armaments structure, there is a move towards protectionism and the establishment of a Fortress Europe mentality. That would be a total misunderstanding of the Government's vision for the new structure. It is not in our interests—political or military—to do that.

This Administration believe passionately in the benefits of open and competitive markets, and strongly value the transatlantic link that has served the security of us all so well during the past decades. The simple fact is that a strong and vibrant European defence industry with expertise in many leading edge technologies is in all our interests.

Our industries must develop quality products that are both affordable and exportable, and which compare favourably with the best in the world. We will not achieve that in an introverted, isolationist European context. We need to take the measure of what the world has to offer, and match or better it. That will generate the domestic and overseas sales essential to the continued well-being of our industries. Our market share of the world's defence markets highlights the need for trading nations to develop openly and competitively.

Dr. Godman: In relation to the safety of crews, has the Ministry any plans to order replacement vessels for the aging ships that service Trident submarines as they enter and leave the Firth of Clyde?

Mr. Arbuthnot: No, I have no plans to announce that during this speech.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): The Minister has made some interesting points about the European armaments agency, and I did not disagree with much of what he said. I understand, however, that that body is to hold a critical meeting this Friday, and that the French and the Germans are arguing that any country that signs up to the agency must then place its orders with European countries. Can the Government elucidate the stance that they will adopt at that meeting?

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is difficult to conduct international negotiations across the Floor of this Chamber or in public, as the hon. Gentleman will understand. I would rather not be tempted, if he will forgive me.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): The Minister knows that I have taken a considerable interest in this matter with him for a long time. How will the

competitiveness of British defence equipment in world markets be enhanced by the activities of the European armaments agency? To whom will the agency be answerable? How will it be funded? Will it not be located in Bonn, not the United Kingdom, which has Europe's premier armaments industry? What are the benefits? Experience with the NATO management agency for the Tornado and with the NATO Euro-fighter management agency shows that what we need is not more bureaucracy but a more commercial approach to procurement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I was just coming to bureaucracy. The agency about which we are negotiating may well be the catalyst for the sort of rationalisation of industry that I discussed earlier. We in the United Kingdom face defence industries in the United States, and increasingly in south-east Asia, which are getting ever larger. There must therefore be further rationalisation across the borders of Europe and the borders of the rest of the world to gain the benefits of large scale which United States industries already enjoy.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North–East): A moment ago, the Minister mentioned the transatlantic connection and the need for open and competitive markets, both points with which I agreed. Does he agree, though, that the transatlantic link could be further strengthened if British defence manufacturers believed that there was an open and competitive market in the United States?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I totally agree. I have argued in the United States and in this country for a two-way street. I recently wrote an article in which I said that, to some extent, there is a two-way street between the United States and Europe, but that, unfortunately, more traffic flows in one direction than in the other. That is not sustainable in the long term, because all the traffic will end up at the wrong end.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): It is not good enough to write articles. How does the Minister intend to deal with the problem of American protectionism? Does he not understand that American companies can make loss-leading bids for procurement contracts with the MOD in ways that can destroy key parts of our defence industrial base; while British and other European companies are not allowed to compete for similar procurements in the United States? The hon. Gentleman cannot just shrug that off as a matter for article writing. It is a point that will have to be dealt with.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I do not shrug it off—that is absurd. I talk to industry in the United States; I talk to senators and congressmen, as do my ministerial colleagues. We try to persuade people in the United States. The same applies to European industries: protectionism is not in the interests of United States industry or of European industry. It is a question, rather, of continually persuading those who in the past have argued in favour of protectionism that it will not help them—

Mr. Home Robertson: But it is happening.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Well, we are arguing strongly against it, and we believe that we are beginning to make some headway. The world is a mutually dependent place; it is a shrinking and a changing world too. A Fortress America would be just as damaging as a Fortress Europe.

The United States is a major market for UK and other European defence goods. To stop American products competing to meet our requirements would ultimately be self-defeating for us, but, as I told the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell), there must be reciprocity—the two-way street should be just that. Governments must commit themselves to keeping defence markets open and avoiding the damaging but tempting voices of protectionism. It helps no one.

We have proved our credentials in the results of recent competitions, in which we have, in turn, been accused of a lack of concern for the United Kingdom's and Europe's industrial base and of an anti-American Anglo-European preference. Neither is correct.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I accept everything that the Minister and Opposition Members have just been saying, but will he use this opportunity to give credit where it is due?

In the world market for defence products British industry does extremely well, because it is competitive and has a technological edge. Can my hon. Friend confirm that more than half the American orders for defence hardware placed with overseas countries come to this country because of the competitiveness of British industry and the quality of our products? What is more, they come here because of the important north Atlantic alliance, which is underpinned by co-operation between British and American companies.

Mr. Arbuthnot: To someone with the expertise of my hon. Friend, I can only say yes.

The recent Farnborough air show epitomised the healthy competition through excellence that exists in the global defence and aerospace sector; it also showed the United Kingdom's leading role in that sector. I pay tribute to the success of our defence industries in today's highly competitive overseas markets. Exports of defence equipment benefit both the country and the Ministry of Defence. They support about 90,000 UK jobs, and in 1995 they brought home about £5 billion-worth of business—almost 20 per cent. of the world export market.

It is our overall defence export objective to maintain and build on this performance over the next five years. We are well on the way to achieving that in 1996. The MOD benefits directly from the sale of equipment overseas through the payment of commercial exploitation levies, where we have helped to fund development. It also benefits indirectly from the lower unit costs which result from the spreading of overheads.

For these reasons, it is appropriate that we continue to give full and vigorous support to British industry in pursuit of overseas sales prospects. That is a vital ingredient of success. Industry's assessment is that, in recent years, some 70 per cent. of the total value of export sales would not have been achieved without assistance from the Defence Export Services Organisation. We will continue to help British industry to compete for success in this important marketplace.

As well as developing our procurement policies, we have also made enormous strides in improving the organisation for procurement. Our service men and

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women need to know that, in the Procurement Executive, they have an organisation no less professional and expert than themselves. It is an organisation which, at its new headquarters in Bristol, can realise its full potential. The new Procurement Executive will save about £100 million a year in running costs alone. The organisation has 35 per cent. fewer staff than in 1990, and has halved the number of people in the very top management levels. That very much reflects the reality of "Front Line First", under which savings such as those can be ploughed back into defence expenditure elsewhere—including, for example, back into the front line. It is our aim to ensure that the Procurement Executive remains nothing less than the best defence procurement agency in the world.

Over the past year, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State outlined yesterday, we have seen a commitment to providing equipment as efficiently as possible. In February, we announced an order for a further three type 23 frigates from Yarrow, valued at £400 million. In July, we announced the decision to order replacements for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid from GEC Marine, worth about £450 million. In March, the contract was let for the Apache attack helicopter from GKN Westland, representing the most important element of the Army's forward equipment programme and an investment of £2.5 billion. In February, new support vehicles—both utility and battlefield ambulances—were ordered from Land Rover, worth some £200 million.

Recent decisions for the RAF represent one of the largest packages of equipment procurement with the purchase of the Nimrod 2000 from British Aerospace, Storm Shadow from British Aerospace and Matra Marconi, and GEC Marconi's Brimstone, with a total value approaching £4 billion and sustaining around 5000 jobs in the UK. Those decisions will bring jobs and support industry throughout the United Kingdom.

For the future, we look to continuing work on the new batch 2 Trafalgar nuclear-powered submarines and the collaborative common new generation frigate for the Navy; the multi-role armoured utility vehicle for the Army; and the assessment of bids for the future medium-range air-to-air missile—one of the key armaments for the Eurofighter and for the RAF.

The House will recall that my right hon. Friend made an important announcement in respect of the Eurofighter at last month's Farnborough Air Show. I wish to repeat that the Government are committed to the production investment, production and support phases of the programme, subject to the satisfactory conclusion of the relevant memoranda of understanding and contractual negotiations. I hope that our German, Italian and Spanish partners will be able to make the same commitment soon. We will be working to avoid any further costly delay in this vital programme.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said yesterday that the equipment we were providing to our armed services was world class. That is because our armed services deserve no less. They are widely respected, and I would go so far as to say they may be the most professional armed services in the world.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Arbuthnot: No, I am winding up.

Look at the job our armed services do. They save lives worldwide with sensitivity and courage, they protect the nation at home and our interests abroad. In that job they represent the people of this country, and they are identified with every man, woman and child. That is why we are so proud of what they do, that is why our armed services have the full commitment and support of this country, and that is why, under a Conservative Government, we will continue to give them the support and commitment they need and deserve.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I must remind the House that Madam Speaker has placed a limit of 10 minutes on all Back-Bench speeches between 7.30 and 9 pm.

5.22 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): I thank the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, and heir presumptive to the baronetcy, for his contribution. It is my pleasurable duty, in view of his announcement, to extend the congratulations of the Opposition and, I am sure, of the whole House to Sir Charles Guthrie on the announcement today of his appointment as the next Chief of the Defence Staff from April next year. That news will be warmly welcomed because Sir Charles Guthrie has served his country well through the Welsh Guards, the British Army on the Rhine, Aden, Special Forces and 22 SAS. I am sure his best years of service are ahead of him, to the benefit of the British armed forces and of this country. I notice from his "Who's Who" entry that he is also a member of the Beefsteak club—I did not know that before today—which presumably means that his appointment had the full support of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. We look forward to that appointment next year. April and May will be an interesting two months—new Labour, new Government, new Chief of the Defence Staff.

On a sadder note, I also wish, on behalf of the Opposition, to express my personal regrets and condolences to the family of Warrant Officer James Bradwell, who died in Northern Ireland. He was the first service man to die there for two years and the first since the ceasefire ended, but we should not forget that he was the 653rd British service man to die for the cause of his country and of peace in that unhappy Province. When we pay our condolences at his death, we give testimony also, symbolically, to the other men and women in our armed services who have served their country and sacrificed themselves on land, on the seas and in the air.

On land in Bosnia, British troops are foremost among the United Nations troops; they have managed to preserve at least a semblance of civilisation, not to mention hundreds of thousands of lives in that war-torn country. On the sea, the Royal Navy serves not only in the Adriatic off Bosnia but in the Gulf, with the Armilla patrol and in its activities against drugs, in which it stands silent sentinel to the values of civilisation.

In our preoccupation with Bosnia, we should not forget what a powder keg the Gulf is. Saddam Hussein—as the Secretary of State for Defence mentioned, correctly, yesterday—will use every opportunity to tease and to

probe the defences and the will of the United Nations and the west. The fact that there are some 30,000 United States troops, some 200-plus combat aircraft, 25 surface ships and two aircraft carriers in the Gulf is numerical testimony to the dangers that lurk there.

We also pay tribute to the constant patrolling by the Royal Air Force in the United Nations designated areas over Iraq and in Bosnia. We have, of course, supported the Government in almost every operational decision that they have taken over the past decade, not because it was expedient to do so but because it has been right. We supported the United Nations protection force, UNPROFOR, when it went into Bosnia, despite the fact that we—together with Back Benchers on both sides of the House and some Ministers—occasionally despaired about the lack of clarity in the objectives and guidelines.

Thankfully, that lack was remedied to some extent with the implementation force and we have made plain our support for the follow-on force, in principle, should it happen. Of course, we wish to see all our major allies involved on the ground and in other areas, but we will give support to British participation under United Nations auspices and as part of NATO.

I wish to add one note of caution. The tasks that have been completed so far in Bosnia, complicated though they were, have been relatively easy, in terms of definition and implementation, for a military force. The tasks have involved separation of forces, patrolling borders in Bosnia, and so on. When the winter snows melt in Bosnia and we reach the next stage for the follow-on force, it will be more difficult to clarify the roles of that military force, because it will have to cope with the return of refugees and, perhaps, social unrest. We must be clear to avoid the mistakes that were made a few years ago, and we must not allow the military to be sucked into what are essentially civilian policing operations. Nevertheless, with that qualification, we pay testimony to our troops.

In these two days of debate, we must be clear that, whatever criticisms are levelled, it is not our service men and women who are on trial but their political masters. Here they are, arrayed in front of us and all together for once in a defence debate—the top brass of the political world in Britain.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who I hope can manage to avoid hot flushes today when criticisms are levied, is fresh from his television spectacular. I hope that everyone saw those 58 minutes on television. The programme, "The Top Brass", was an amazing success—an amazing risk.

I enjoyed the 56 minutes of the programme that were devoted to the life and times of Sir Nicholas Soames. I am glad that the Secretary of State was allowed a walk-on part—or was it simply his picture in the background on the walls of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces?

Having been somewhat eclipsed on the television arena, the Secretary of State had to find himself another stage. Last week, there was one by the seaside. We all saw that week-long, bizarre spectacle.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Reid: Yes, I shall certainly give way to the working-class hero on the Conservative Benches.

Mr. Gallie: It is all very well to joke about the activities of Conservative Members, but the hon. Gentleman made a serious point a few minutes ago. He suggested that if widespread catastrophe occurred in Bosnia—with perhaps people dying all over the place—the armed forces would step back. That would be against the wishes of my constituents who have written to me in great numbers on that issue and on Rwanda. Will the hon. Gentleman clarify what he said?

Dr. Reid: Yes. With all due respect to the hon. Gentleman, I was saying exactly the opposite. Where military tasks are involved, it is appropriate that the British armed forces should be present, and it would have the support of the whole House. But if increasingly the task is to solve disputes between neighbours about who is entitled to go to what house as the refugees return, which is clearly a civilian policing task, we must make it clear that the objectives, rules of engagement, aims and use of the armed forces are limited to tasks that are compatible with their experience and within the practical possibilities of military implementation.

The armed forces must not become a secondary substitute for civilian police forces, especially as we shall have at least four indigenous police forces in the three areas, plus the central police force. My comment was not meant as a criticism of our armed forces. It is a worry that Ministers will have and will be keen to avoid.

May I return to what I was saying about the Secretary of State? At last week's conference, he intelligently discussed almost everything except defence. That was in keeping with the bizarre nature of the conference. I do not know what the message was. Naturally, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was the highlight of the conference for the first two days. We were constantly told that he did not have an enemy in the world. He has no compulsion to find enemies as he seems to be hated by all his friends, so he does not need one.

The Prime Minister again tried to send out a message of leadership on defence, as on everything else. If I were a prime ministerial adviser, I would despair. Nice man though he may be, he seems to find it impossible to summon from within himself the directional leadership that this country desperately needs. I often think that, had the Prime Minister been leading the Israelites out of the desert, he would have returned down Mount Sinai with the ten suggestions rather than the ten commandments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are supposed to be debating the defence estimates.

Dr. Reid: We are indeed, and the essence of any defence force is command, control and leadership. I was pointing out that, from the top, that has been lacking for the country as well as for the armed forces.

The man in charge of defence, the Secretary of State, has come hotfoot from his production on the Bournemouth stage of the adaptation of Cromwell's "Put your trust in John, but keep your powder dry". Last year on the stage, he called in aid the SAS and the special forces; this year we had the adoption of Fabian tactics, which was to keep the powder dry until after the next election.

We are not sitting in judgment on our armed forces; we are not even sitting in judgment on what the Tory party did on defence at Bournemouth. We are sitting in judgment on the two Tory parties represented in front of

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us. To use military acronyms, we have the OTT and the NTS—the old Tory toffs and the new Tory spivs. A deal has been concocted between them on defence, as on other issues, to try to cover up that division.

Over the past two days, we have talked of trying to build a consensus on defence. No one should think that a consensus on defence means that we do not criticise each other or that we agree on everything. It means that we agree on a framework to lift national security above party interests and the interests of factions inside parties, which is precisely why I made the point about the division within the Conservative party. I shall outline the areas on which we agree before discussing the areas on which we have massive differences.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): If the hon. Gentleman is interested in rising above party politics, will he congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on his excellent and statesmanlike speech at Bournemouth? Will he join my right hon. Friend in congratulating the 9,000 British troops with IFOR in Bosnia, who have delivered on disarming and separating the forces and on a successful election in September?

Dr. Reid: All right, just for the sake of consensus, I do so on both counts.

There are matters on which the House can agree, some of which have been mentioned already. They include the rationalisation of our reserve forces, which has been undertaken by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. He consulted widely beforehand, gave some thought to the detail and listened to criticism from ourselves and others. On that basis, we gave the legislation a fair wind.

Again, this year's aims and objectives of the Ministry of Defence, as outlined in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1996", includes the obligation

"To provide the strategic direction on behalf of Her Majesty's Government".

All I can say to that is hooray, but we should not have had to wait 17 years to find that strategic direction is one of the objectives of the Ministry of Defence. It should have been an objective at the start of the Tory Government, not in their dying months.

Progress has also been made on joint operations. It makes sense to have joint training of helicopter pilots from all three services. The establishment of a joint permanent headquarters is a significant advance in operational capability, and I am grateful for the access and briefings that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces gave me on that matter. But even where both sides of the House have agreed on those trends, the Government have found it impossible to avoid the incompetence that has marked so many of their ventures.

A number of the ventures relate to their approach to joint service activities—for example, the tragic and shambolic plans for the joint staff college, which seems to be in a constant state of flux. The sell-off of the Greenwich naval college was decided on the basis of figures which, on investigation, the Defence Select Committee subsequently found to be inadequate and incomplete. The Secretary of State was forced to do a U-turn on his plans for the unfettered right to sell off the college willy-nilly to whomever he chose.

We then found that the plans to site the joint college at the Army college at Camberley were delayed by a lack of suitable accommodation. Temporary resiting to the air staff college at Bracknell was then accompanied by an announcement that private funding would be sought not only for the extra accommodation needed but for the whole staff college project. With the best will in the world, and trying to be as non-partisan as possible, I believe that, if we manage to reach a general agreement on consensus, it will be difficult to sustain it, given such shambolic incompetence in what should be a relatively simple decision.

On the subject of the joint rapid deployment force, we welcomed the Secretary of State's announcement 18 months ago. We welcomed his reannouncement of it three months later and we welcomed his third announcement. At the time, I said that the only rapid things about the force were the rate and consistency with which it was being reannounced.

As soon as the force was set up in August, the Secretary of State made yet another announcement. A press report stated that Britain's elite rapid deployment force was to lose an entire battalion of paras just three weeks after its launch because of huge overstretch. The rapid deployment force, which was not formed too rapidly, then had no one to deploy. In the face of such incompetence, we have difficulty maintaining cross-party consensus on essentially good ideas.

We have complained that, even when the parties agree on issues, the Ministry of Defence must be constantly goaded or prompted into action which must ultimately be taken and from which it could derive some credit if it did so without being badgered. Hon. Members have mentioned some examples. The MOD was goaded constantly to respond adequately on the issue of Gulf war syndrome. I do not question Ministers' sincerity on that issue: they are in a difficult position, as they must be judges regarding what happened, prosecutors when seeking evidence about what might have occurred, and then defendants, as ultimately they will be liable if it is found that something went wrong.

Nevertheless, Ministers should have realised earlier that important issues regarding our obligation and our loyalty to service men and women will not go away. If we find that there was negligence initially or subsequent negligence in investigating the matter, leading to accusations of a cover-up, Ministers must take the strongest possible action.

The MOD was prompted to take action about the treatment of our service men and it has been pushed to adopt a rational view regarding service women. I do not know exactly how much we have paid out to pregnant service women, but it is more than £50 million. If the MOD had listened to those who warned of a problem, we would have been spared the indignity of treating women in that fashion and saved £50 million in hard-earned Treasury money, which could have been spent on much-needed equipment.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): The hon. Gentleman's argument would carry more weight if he did not speak for a party that is committed to adopting the

social chapter, which we opted out of in the Maastricht treaty. It would impose more rules and regulations across all sectors of British life.

Dr. Reid: I have great respect for the hon. Gentleman, but I wish that he were sure of his facts. The social chapter specifically excludes the armed forces and therefore is not relevant to my point about pregnant service men and women. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am trying to be politically correct—as my party knows, I have a long history of political correctness.

The matter of the Commission for Racial Equality was raised yesterday. No one suggests that the ministerial offices of the Crown are filled with racists, but there is something wrong when the Commission for Racial Equality must threaten to drag the Ministry of Defence through the courts to force it to implement plans with which the MOD says that it agrees. Despite the comments of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, the truth is that the MOD was over a barrel due to its tardiness in making advances on the question of recruitment from ethnic minorities. It was an abject surrender. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) described the MOD's backdown to the CRE as the first unconditional surrender by British forces since Yorktown.

Despite that, we have much to be proud of. As the Minister said, we are blessed with the quality of our service men and women and, similarly, of those involved in our manufacturing industry. Two weeks ago, I was privileged to visit the Royal Armoured Corps with Sir Charles Guthrie to view Challenger 2. It is a marvellous example of British engineering which is manned by skilled, highly trained crews from the Royal Armoured Corps. I will not go so far as to say that it floats like a butterfly and stings like a bee but, for something that size, it is an impressive example of British engineering and martial skill.

Our manufacturing record is, however, continually marred by the Government's apparent incapacity to produce the goods on time and at cost. I do not blame the MOD entirely, but several weeks ago I was interested to read one of its press releases about the Phoenix spy plane. Hon. Members probably know that the plane is extremely effective but seldom comes back in one piece—which somewhat limits its operational usefulness. It is like a boomerang that goes only one way. The press release stated:

"We now have confidence in the cost-effectiveness, tactical performance and reliability of the system to meet the army's requirements".

The plane is now expected to be in service by 1998, which is great—except that it was due in service in 1989. The MOD is proudly boasting that equipment which is seven or eight years overdue will be delivered in three or four years.

We do not blame the Government for every delay. However, any objective observer who examined the pattern of consistent delays would conclude that it was the only area where the Government appeared to have a strategy. I am reminded that Napoleon once instructed Bourrienne not to open his letters for three weeks and, after that time, expressed satisfaction that most of the correspondence had resolved itself. I have a feeling that the Secretary of State is adopting a Napoleonic strategy to defence procurement: if we delay indefinitely, the need will go away. But it will not.

Similarly, we do not blame the Government for every cost overrun—we know that there are technical difficulties and updated requirements. However, at the end of the day, we seem to spend much more on almost every project—except Trident, of course. The Minister spoke about that at great length today. I do not know whether he is good with figures. I know that he is a Chancery lawyer—I discovered that before he came into the Chamber. I do not know what that is—perhaps it is someone who defends chancers, which would explain why he is at the Ministry of Defence. The Minister is certainly not good with Roman numerals, since he spoke to me recently about our proud role in winning world war eleven.

I think that the cost overruns are due to something in the system rather than to the personal inadequacies of the Minister of State for Defence Procurement. At least tonight we can welcome the fact that he referred to the system of procurement. He mentioned data information systems and the need to bring the three services together. That is a great idea. However, by chance I met a man on a train who worked in that area and he told me that the three computer systems were incompatible. I pass on that information from someone at the coal face; I do not know whether it is accurate.

We agree on many issues. There is no major difference in our views on NATO: it is the cornerstone of our policy. We believe in developing the Western European Union and that it should not be part of the European Union.

Dr. Spink: What will the hon. Gentleman agree with next week?

Dr. Reid: Anything that the Conservatives say that makes sense. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to belong to a party that has a knee-jerk reaction of saying black every time someone says white, he is entitled to do so. I want to belong to a party that is capable of analysing the real world and of reaching rational conclusions and that is prepared to agree with anyone who has reached the same conclusions on the basis of the same analysis. I am not ashamed of that; we have operated in that way for some considerable time. We support "Partnership for Peace", the domestic joint service operation and the combined operations with our allies abroad, all of which should be the basis for common agreement.

There are, however, two major obstacles to the development in Britain of a consensual framework on defence. The first is the fact that the Government refuse to have a real review of the pattern of overstretch, which has placed an intolerable burden on ordinary service men and women. Not only is the situation not improving, despite constant promises, but it is getting much worse. Ministers speak as though the problem had been revealed to them suddenly from on high. I have only one simple point to make: if the demographic curve shows that the market for people joining the armed forces—people aged between 18 and 24—has plummeted, it may come as a surprise to the Government, but it was predictable about 18 to 24 years ago.

Anyone could have read the runes of the coming drop in demography. We warned six years ago from the Opposition Front Bench that there would be just such a shortage of recruits. As all hon. Members know, we are now 4,000 short of the establishment figures even for forces that would be overstretched had they attained those figures.

[Dr. Reid]

Overstretch is not just a matter of a fall in the demographic curves. It reveals astonishing complacency and incompetence by successive Ministers. Recruitment has been constantly undermined by the closure and reopening of Army recruitment centres, the closure and reinstatement of regiments and the MOD's constant chopping about and incapacity for forward planning. Over the past 10 years, Ministers have introduced the concept of stop-go planning into the Ministry of Defence. That is the first problem we have in developing a consensus, and it is one of the reasons—not the only one—why we insist on a real strategic security review and why we will carry that out in government.

The Government have failed in a second crucial area: by imposing their ideology of privatisation and contractorisation as a dogma on the services, they have undermined organisations bound together by the ethos of collective cohesion. Group loyalty may mean nothing to the unfettered free marketeers; it means everything to those whose lives depend on it. It does not show up on a profit and loss account or feature in an accountant's log, but the ethos of the military group is still a vital, permeating, irreplaceable asset for the operational effectiveness of our forces.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): May I clarify one point for the hon. Gentleman before he goes any further? We do not regard the Government as having any consensus with the Labour party on any single defence issue. Will he give one example of a reform of the type which he is talking about that has undermined the cohesion of the armed forces, bearing in mind that, in my view, the new management strategy, for example, has been the greatest single liberating measure ever achieved to allow the services to run their own affairs?

Dr. Reid: I will answer both points directly. The Minister rejects any attempt to make national security a matter of national consensus, above party politics. Most people in this country, including those in the armed services, are sick and tired of the yah-boo politics conducted in the House over national security. People are desperate for politicians of all parties to put aside their petty partisan differences when it comes to our national security and to put country above party. They will have noticed that any attempt by us—no matter how constructive—to build such a consensus, is rejected.

With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, he will not be in a position to offer consensus or otherwise; the governing party next year will offer that consensus, and that will be the Labour party.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Reid: When I have answered the Minister's second question. The hon. Gentleman would not like me to be discourteous, and the answer will be of interest also to him.

The Minister asked me for an example of contractorisation undermining the cohesion and effectiveness of the armed forces. The contractorisation process for the maintenance of RAF aircraft is such an example. It was put out to tender and won by a private company—I spoke to RAF mechanics who were bitterly disappointed about that. The private company undercut the RAF, which was allowed to tender in that particular station, but was told that, even if it won, it would have to keep to the establishment numbers agreed in "Options for Change" and defence cuts studies—in other words, even if the RAF won the tender, it would still have to lose it.

The RAF can be undercut by a private company that can make a low tender because it does not have to train mechanics or pay them the wages of the RAF. It does not have to do that because it recruits RAF-trained service men who have been made redundant and are on a pension from the MOD, so the same people do the maintenance on Royal Air Force aeroplanes for a private company. Five years down the road, there will be no RAF-trained mechanics on the base, because the RAF lost the tender, but nor will there be trained mechanics in the private company, because it put in a low tender.

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman does not know what he is talking about.

Dr. Reid: The Minister says that I do not know what I am talking about, but I am telling him what I was told by the people involved. We shall find out who is right when we have to pick up the pieces after the shambles created by the dogmatic imposition of free market values on a service that believes in collective loyalty and group cohesion. If Ministers do not understand the importance of that to the armed forces, they do not understand anything.

Mr. Wilkinson: The hon. Gentleman has been his engaging and entertaining self. He speaks about consensus and about group cohesion and refers to a prospective Government, whose members I presume he imagines lurk on the Opposition Benches, but what about the amendment that stands in the names of his hon. Friends who sit below the Gangway? That is, manifestly, totally distinct from his policy and that of his Front-Bench colleagues. If he cannot achieve consensus even within his own party on fundamental security issues, how does he hope do it in government?

Dr. Reid: On the last point, the hon. Gentleman, who is an intelligent man, is sufficiently semantically aware to know that there is a difference between consensus and unanimity. *[Laughter.]* The cynics laugh. I read somewhere that cynicism is the crutch that intellectual cripples sometimes have to lean on as a substitute for intelligence.

I do indeed seek consensus. Is that consensus to be built around the position proposed by a small number of my hon. Friends tonight? No. Do I reject their views? Yes. Have I anything in common with the main thrust of their views on defence as expressed in the amendment? No. Is their view in accord with the Labour party conference decision? No. It is totally in opposition to the views of the Labour party conference, the parliamentary Labour party and the party leadership. I cannot be any plainer.

On contractorisation, I merely say one thing, because I cannot put it better than Basil Liddell Hart put it some 50 years ago when he wrote:

"living in an atmosphere of soldierly duty and esprit de corps permeates the soul, whereas drill merely attunes the muscles."

Basil Liddell Hart got it right. It would be to everyone's benefit if the Secretary of State for Defence paid a little more attention to Basil Liddell Hart than to Mr. David Hart when taking decisions inside the MOD.

Another obstacle to consensus is the Government's response to entreaties—*[Interruption.]* The Minister of State for the Armed Forces is shouting—I think he said "Insane!"—from a sedentary position. He will get his chance to put his case later, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but he has already made it plain: not only will he not seek agreement in the House on anything, but he will reject it outright from the beginning when it is offered.

It is relatively easy to identify the challenges that face the armed forces in this country. We know that the type of threat has changed. We know the problems that are occurring in the developments in Russia. We know about changes in the military architectural structure. All those things are talked about constantly. There are, however, one or more deep social changes that no one has yet faced up to, but future Governments will have to face up to them, because although they are not the most obvious changes, they are profound in terms of their effect on the armed forces of this country. They are changes in society. I shall outline three of them, because as far as I am aware they have not been mentioned.

The first is perhaps the most obvious: the general perception widely held by the public that the threat has gone. I agree entirely with what the Secretary of State said at length yesterday. The threats have not gone. In many ways, there are more threats now than before. War is not cost-free, despite the experience of Bosnia. Whatever we say in the House, the general perception among the public is that the threat has gone. One reason for the successive cuts in defence budgets over the past 10 years is the fact that, when the Cabinet has to decide how money will be allocated, it reflects what the public feel, and the general impression is that the public do not feel that defence should be a recipient of large amounts of money, because they do not perceive that there is a threat. Therefore, all of us who do perceive it have a duty to join together whenever we can to combat complacency among the public. That is the first great social change to which we must attend.

The second change is in the personal experience of most people in this country. I give one fact to the House. In the 20 years to 1964, 6.5 million British people had been through the armed forces. Some 30 years ago, 20 million families had personal experience of, links with or empathy with the armed forces. In the 20 years to 1994, the figure was only 500,000. In 20 years' time, it will be around 300,000. In other words, contrasting 30 years back and 30 years forward, for every 100 people who have experience or empathy with the armed forces, there will be only three. That is the second great change that we cannot ignore. If we do, we do so at our peril.

The third change is in cultural attitudes in society: the growth throughout the 1980s of unfettered individualism—Thatcherism at its worst. There has been some discussion of what benefits we may have gained from Thatcherism. We could discuss that all night. We certainly gained one huge social deficit as well: the idea that the individual should enrich him or herself irrespective of what happened in the rest of the population, the idea that the biblical merit of the good samaritan lay not in good deeds but in the fact that he was rich—a sort of biblical yuppie. There was the idea that one had no obligation to anyone else, because "society" did not exist.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Portillo): Disgraceful!

Dr. Reid: I am using the words of the Secretary of State's mentor. It is no good him telling us that it is disgraceful. He was standing behind her, cheering, when she was telling us that, for 10 years.

Not only is that completely at odds with the ethos of our armed services: it is a destructive worm at the heart of our social and cultural attitudes in Britain. Thank God people are moving back from it.

Taken together, those three changes mean that, in terms of personal experience, empathy and cultural attitude, the gap is growing between the value system of the population in general and the ethos and life style of the armed forces in particular. How do we begin to face those challenges? Every hon. Member who has the armed forces at heart knows that they are challenges.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The hon. Gentleman has made one or two very good points, but I do not agree with his third challenge. As he will know, I served in the armed forces in the late 1980s. He mentioned the tremendous selfishness of the 1980s. I was commanding some of what are termed "Thatcher's children", and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that those young men were just as good as young men had been 10 or 15 years before. They were excellent. They were honourable, loyal and, decent, and they looked after other people. They responded to all the things that the hon. Gentleman is talking about, so he must agree that his third challenge is a load of bunkum.

Dr. Reid: Far from contradicting me, the hon. Gentleman reinforces everything that I said. I said that unfettered individualism existed outside the armed forces. People who joined the armed forces out of a sense of public service, who rejected the denigration of the idea of public service, who believed that the individual should make sacrifices for the group, who rejected Thatcherite values, were the very people who joined the British armed forces, and they are still there. Those values are deep inside the British armed forces, and we must ensure that we help to build a bridge between civilian attitudes and those of the armed forces.

There are two ways to do that: the first is to have a vision for Britain's role in the world, in which our armed forces play a significant part. I believe that the Labour party can create such a vision. We believe that, at home, individuals have responsibilities to their neighbours. We believe that that is the same abroad. We believe therefore that we have not only rights on the international stage but responsibilities. One of those responsibilities is to create a world order out of the chaos, and the British armed forces throughout their history are uniquely placed to contribute to that role.

The second is to start to restore a trend, which is already moving in the direction of the beliefs that we hold, in the culture and attitudes of people in this country outside the armed forces; to raise again the idea of public service as a public good rather than as some left-wing

[Dr. Reid]

Utopian wishy-washy social work idea; to say again that public service is good for the country, not only inside the armed forces but outside; to talk of social responsibility as well as social rights; to raise again trust, honour and integrity as obligations that we owe to each other in society.

All those elements have survived in the armed forces, and they should—and, I hope, will—be encouraged outside. It is time to restore the elevation of public service and social responsibility as well as individual rights outside. The time has come to restore pride in our armed forces and our country. Neither the current Secretary of State nor the Conservative Government are capable of doing that, but within a year there will be a Government who will, because the Labour Government will make that a key priority.

6.8 pm

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid)—who speaks on behalf of Her Majesty's Opposition, and long may he continue to do so—but I do not know where he has been in terms of visiting Her Majesty's forces if he thinks that they lack a sense of pride and purpose. I defy anyone who has visited the British Army, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force in their different deployments worldwide to come away with such a misguided opinion. It is just baloney, and the hon. Gentleman should know better.

The hon. Gentleman has done his best to be consensual today and he assures us that if, by mischance, the Labour party wins the next general election, there will be a consensus within his party.

Dr. Reid: I will seek a consensus.

Mr. Churchill: The hon. Gentleman now qualifies that by saying that he will seek a consensus within his party. He will have an uphill struggle because on the matter of defence, and above all on nuclear defence, his party is split from top to bottom, no matter how hard the Leader of the Opposition may try to paper over the chasm.

I warmly welcome the announcement of the appointment of General Sir Charles Guthrie as Chief of Defence Staff. He is a first-class soldier, and I have no doubt at all that his will be an excellent appointment. I also pay tribute to our armed forces whom, as a member of the Select Committee on Defence, I have the privilege of visiting at so many locations in so many of their roles world wide. One thinks especially at present of our forces serving in Northern Ireland and those in Bosnia where, together with our allies, they are holding the ring and bringing back some semblance of normality and peace to that strife-torn land.

It is a regrettable fact that, one year in every four, our great ally across the seas, the United States, takes leave of its senses and indulges in an unashamed 12 months of electioneering. It becomes quite impossible to get any coherent response, let alone leadership, out of the United States during an election year. In the case of Bosnia, that risks being all too tragic, because the President has committed himself publicly to the withdrawal of US forces from IFOR in the former Yugoslavia before the year is out.

Were that to happen—I very much hope that it will not, and that the matter will be reconsidered as a matter of urgency—it would pull the rug from under the allies who are doing so much to bring peace back to Bosnia. It would make vain all the efforts that the international community, and not least our armed forces, have made during the past four years to try to bring Bosnia back from the brink.

It is essential that a successor to IFOR, with US participation, should go forward and that that should be announced at the earliest possible moment. It may be on a reduced level. That is not important. What is important is that the United States is there and that it forms part of the alliance engaged on the ground in Bosnia. However much, as Europeans, we may regret it, it was the adherence, involvement and commitment of the United States in IFOR, which was so conspicuously absent in UNPROFOR, that completely changed the perception of the local warring factions towards the international community trying to bring them back from the brink.

I am conscious that time is limited and I will confine myself to just a couple of further topics. As has already been said, our armed forces are unquestionably the finest in the world. But without the proper equipment, even the finest cannot give of their best. No single item of equipment which is due to enter service in the immediate future is more important than the European fighter aircraft. It is not only an important exercise in defence co-operation within Europe, but it is at the heart of the future capability of the Royal Air Force.

We now hear ugly rumours that Germany is minded to wreck co-operation in that area by drastically stretching out the time scale of procurement for EFA in order, we are told, to enable Germany to meet the criteria for joining a single European currency to which Chancellor Kohl has committed himself, despite the fact that it is likely to cause a drastic split within the European unity so painfully built up over the past 40 years.

As was perceptively observed by the late Julian Amery—a former Member for Preston and for Brighton, Pavilion, whose loss we keenly mourn—France seeks to appease Germany in its every move and sits like a mahout atop the ears of the German elephant, vainly and ineffectually seeking to steer the elephant in the direction that France wishes it to go. That is not happening, however, and it is most regrettable that, unlike the British Government, our German allies should not take on board the importance of co-operation in this vital area of European defence. By their actions, they threaten to wreck the fledgling co-operation that has been developed in recent years in that area. I trust that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, as well as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, will bring home to the German Government just how important we regard that particular joint venture.

On more than one occasion in the past, I have been minded to criticise my party's Government for not doing enough on defence. As the election approaches, however, there can be no question but that the greatest threat to the effectiveness and capability of Britain's armed forces comes from new Labour. Its proposal for a comprehensive review of defence may sound reasonable enough to the uninitiated, but every time there is a defence review it is the Treasury that wins and the armed services are forced to beat an undignified retreat. In Labour hands, a defence review can only mean massive defence cuts.

In the six years up to 1994, the Labour party conference voted to reduce Britain's defence expenditure to the European average. That represents a cut of £4.5 billion—equivalent to the abolition of the Royal Navy. That cut, combined with Labour's antipathy to defence sales to many foreign countries, could threaten vast numbers of the 400,000 defence-related jobs in Britain. Only last year, the Transport and General Workers Union—which I believe sponsors the leader of the Labour party—proposed at its conference to slash defence expenditure by no less than £18 billion. What the Labour party could do with the remaining £4 billion in terms of national defence, let alone co-operation with our allies, I just cannot fathom, but new Labour is split from top to bottom on the defence issue.

We are assured that new Labour is different from old Labour, but who are new Labour? Eighteen of the 24 members of the shadow Cabinet in the Commons were opposed, at various times, to Britain's independent nuclear deterrent. At the height of the cold war, nine of those 18 called for Britain's withdrawal from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and for the expulsion of American forces from their British bases. Theirs is a party divided on the essentials of defence. It is divided on Trident, on Britain's independent nuclear capability and on maintaining a strong and effective defence posture. What faith can the armed forces, let alone our allies, have in such a motley, inexperienced and divided crew?

6.20 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I will not follow the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) down that line. I will merely say, "Old Tories, old misrepresentations".

Mine will be a short speech which I believe will be greeted with enthusiasm by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I want to bring constituency problems to the attention of the House and especially the Minister of State for the Armed Forces.

During the autumn, I attended various ceremonies on the closure of RAF Carlisle. Some fine tributes have been paid to the base's work in the past 58 years and I wish to add mine tonight. I still argue that it was wrong to close the base, but the decision has been taken and the base will cease to be operational by the end of the year.

In the RAF debate in June, I brought two problems appertaining to the base to the Minister's attention, and I am glad to say that he was accommodating on both of them. One was the plan to store bonemeal from culled cows at the base, which was adding insult to injury. The other was that the Ministry of Defence had reneged on its decision to go into partnership to develop the base. Since then, however, through the Minister's good offices, there has been a policy change and we are getting along with the base's development.

There are still, however, two contentious issues. One is of a material kind and affects the base's future. The second is symbolic. It needs to be brought to the Minister's attention so that he can perhaps change his mind.

The first is on the former RAF base's development. We are fortunate that many companies are interested in purchasing or leasing sites on the base. We need to put the infrastructure in place. Everything was going reasonably well. We made a Konver bid and we scored high on the points system. We were told unofficially that it was likely that we would receive £1.1 million to develop the infrastructure, as would the scheme in Chorley. That amount was not exactly what we needed, but it was satisfactory.

Since then, due to objections from authorities that were not considered, I understand that it is all back in the melting pot. I should be grateful if the Minister could use his good offices to reconsider the position. I know that the Department of Trade and Industry is the lead Department on the issue, but the Ministry of Defence clearly has an important part to play.

Mr. Soames: I do not have that information here tonight, but in the light of what the hon. Gentleman has said, I will look into the matter tomorrow and have a reply for him on the Members' letter board within 48 hours.

Mr. Martlew: I was hoping that the Minister would say that. I remember him being courteous to me on many occasions—or I think I remember.

The other problem is one in which the Minister has direct authority, and I hope that he will be as considerate on this one. It concerns the gate guardian at RAF Carlisle. As hon. Members will be aware, most RAF bases have a redundant military aircraft outside the base. RAF Carlisle had a McDonnell Douglas Phantom, which was appropriate because RAF Carlisle was a maintenance unit that kept all the American spares.

The local aviation museum, which is based at Carlisle airport nine miles away, made a request either to purchase the Phantom or to have it on permanent loan, and I wrote to the Minister asking whether that was possible. The answer was that, because it was an American aircraft and the American Government maintained the disposal rights of any redundant aircraft, it would not be possible without the Americans' permission.

I wrote to the American embassy in London, which assured me that it would probably consider the transfer favourably if the Government went through the correct channels and asked the embassy for the transfer. I wrote to the Minister, who said that the transfer was not possible, that it would cost too much money and that that was not the way forward. He regretted the decision and acknowledged that the base's 58 years of service to the nation was an outstanding achievement, but he still would not take that decision.

I cannot understand that attitude, because, nine miles away, there is RAF Spadeadam. Anyone who knows the history of the British ballistic missile or the British space probe will remember that the Blue Streak rocket was tested at Spadeadam. It is now a base for electronic warfare, but it is an RAF base. It could easily keep an eye on the Phantom—not that anyone is going to steal it—and there would not be any expense.

I understand that the gate guardian is to be transferred to RAF Sealand, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones). I wish RAF Sealand all the best and I am sure that it is a good base, but I regret that our gate guardian is being sent there. First, it is an insensitive decision, because, five years ago, RAF Carlisle lost more than 100 avionic jobs to RAF Sealand. Secondly, like all other bases, RAF Sealand already has a gate guardian—I believe that it is a Hunter fighter—so it does not need an extra one. The expense of

[Mr. Martlew]

taking the plane, which will have to go by road, from RAF Carlisle to RAF Sealand will be far more than keeping an eye on it at the Solway aviation museum.

The Minister has already been obliging on one occasion. There is a symbolism here that he cannot brush aside. It is important for the future that he decides that the Phantom will stay in Carlisle, that it will be looked after by RAF Spadeadam and that, over the years, we in the region will be able to look at that plane with pride to remind us of the 58 years of fine service that RAF Carlisle gave to the nation.

6.28 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I echo the closing part of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence's speech yesterday, in which he rightly said that there is a serious danger that Bosnia could teach us the wrong lessons. He said that, as recently as 1991, we found ourselves facing, wholly expectedly, a high-intensity war in which we had remarkably light casualties, but which involved an enemy with large quantities of highly capable equipment.

I was talking that morning to a gentleman—whose name I shall not mention because he has no opportunity to reply, but who is a well respected commentator on diplomatic and military affairs—who told me that the Government had got it all wrong and that the solution to squaring the circle on military budgets was to stop "refighting the cold war", to stop buying highly expensive equipment such as the European fighter aircraft, which he was convinced we would never use, and instead to focus more heavily on the sort of equipment that would be most useful for Bosnia and other peacekeeping operations. He mentioned the shortage of suitably adaptable light armoured vehicles.

In the last century, after we had defeated Napoleon, there was a strong feeling that the armed forces had a variety of roles, including exploring the world and policing our incipient empire, but that fighting a high-intensity war of the era would not again be necessary. Frankly, we had a pretty rough time of it in the Crimea, but that was relatively small compared with the shock that we got in 1914 when we had an army that was designed only as a back-up for a colonial police operation. It was an army of brave, disciplined people, but with none of the modern equipment of its enemy. It is not an exaggeration to say that if the Admiralty and the Navy estimates had been treated in the way in which the War Office and the Army estimates had been treated by the House for a generation, we would have been in serious danger of losing the first world war, perhaps fairly early on.

The truth is that armed forces do not exist to deal with the here and now: that is not their principal purpose. However important the situation in Bosnia, however anxious we may be to contribute to the crisis in Rwanda, however urgent the various demands on our military manpower in peacetime, the prime purpose of the armed forces is to deal with the crisis that arises only once in a generation—it may not arise for 50 or 60 years—when there is a threat to the continued existence of the nation.

There is a nasty whiff of history about the events taking place in the ex-Soviet states. Twice in the past 200 years the largest power in Europe has imploded economically and politically, its armed forces have felt humiliated and the price of bread on the streets has risen. One was post-revolutionary France; the other was Weimar Germany. *[Interruption.]* I shall gladly give way to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, as he obviously wants to say something—no, he does not.

I support my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's comment that the prime requirement is to maintain a capability to participate in and deter a high-intensity war. When we look at what has happened in the ex-Soviet states and at the situation in Russia, whose leader is on his sickbed, we should worry about the potential for things to go badly wrong. On a visit to Russia last year, I met the leader of the communist party in that region, who came to power there a few weeks after my visit. I am afraid that our visit to provide political advice to his democratic opponents was a complete failure. He was a most impressive guy. The last words he said to me as I left that meeting were, "Mr. Brazier, you must not imagine that you, in the west, can disassociate yourself from what is unfolding in this country. Just remember the panic you had in the west because one nuclear power complex in Ukraine went critical 10 years ago. Think of the scope for things to go wrong in a country with 40,000 nuclear weapons." Neither post-revolutionary France nor Weimar Germany had nuclear weapons.

The serious problems that could threaten our vital national interests are not just the other side of what used to be the iron curtain. There is a dangerous stand-off between Israel and the Palestinian people, which could destabilise that end of the Mediterranean. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein—a man who is sitting almost on top of the bulk of the world's oil supplies—is once again throwing his weight about. Iran is developing a nuclear programme. Indeed, the Iranians largely financed the successful North Korean nuclear programme.

We do not know when the next threat of a high-intensity war will come. We do not know whether it will be in six months, six years or 16 years—but I would put money on its not being 60 years away. The Secretary of State is right to say that the maintenance of a high-intensity war fighting capability must remain the core of our defence programme and must never turn into a collection of peacetime commitments, even though some of them, including Northern Ireland, are vital to our national security. Two issues stem from that. First, when deciding how much we can take on—in particular, the decision, which is very close now, on our future role in Bosnia—we must ask not only whether we can play such a role within an affordable resource base, but how far it will compromise, through overstretch, our ability to maintain that core war fighting capability.

Secondly, my right hon. Friend's comment emphasises the divide across the Chamber. We have heard from the Labour Front Bench that one of the first things a Labour Government would do on coming to office would be to hold a defence review. None of the Labour Front Bench speeches included a clear statement about the criteria for that review. The Labour party is not keen on spending more money on defence. I shall not refer to party conferences again, but it is certainly not proposing any more money. Moreover, there is a terrific appetite on the Labour Back Benches for more and more peacekeeping operations. I suspect that the core requirement for a high-intensity capability with world class armed forces whose prime role is to defend the vital interests of this

country within our principal alliance would be progressively eroded and undermined if the Labour party was ever to take power.

In the closing minutes of my speech, I should like to focus on personnel issues. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces is replying to today's debate. The Government have undoubtedly given us the tools, particularly in the past few months. They have given the armed forces a series of extremely important orders. The three Air Force orders made in the summer came on top of earlier orders for the Apache, the medium-lift helicopters, the Hercules, the three new frigates and the amphibious ships announced in July, but we still have serious concerns about personnel matters.

I welcome the fact that recruitment is beginning to pick up a little, but overstretch has become a serious problem. The Navy's commitments have increased by one third in the past 10 years, while the number of warships has fallen by one third. The result is that our ship crews are working twice as hard. One hears again and again of examples of overstretch in the Army. I recently heard of a soldier who has spent three consecutive Christmases away from his family. If that soldier does not get back from Bosnia in November, this will be his fourth Christmas away. People understand the need to make such sacrifices. None the less, numbers are becoming extremely tight.

I would like to make four points about personnel, and I am sure that, as ever, my hon. Friend the Minister will listen to them. First, one element of the Bett report is causing enormous disquiet in the forces—it has been mentioned to me by several people at different levels. It concerns the prospect of job reviews across the three services.

A little of that occurred under the Labour Government in the 1960s, and there was endless hassle and argument over, for example, the relative merits of a tank commander and an engineer section commander. Review caused much disquiet and unhappiness. The idea that we should extend it across all ranks in the forces and begin to determine a much larger proportion of the pay packet by people's individual jobs rather than simply their rank and how long they have held it may appeal enormously to those who are management consultant minded, but it is deeply unpopular in the forces and a recipe for instability. I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that the idea is best buried.

The second personnel issue is about rents. The Ministry has made some welcome changes to its proposals to sell off married quarters stock. It is no secret that I was opposed to the measure, but I welcome the fact that the site exchange option has been dropped. I also welcome the appointment of Sir Thomas Macpherson as chairman of the Annington trust. Nevertheless, the biggest single factor that will affect the ordinary MOD tenant next April will be whether they receive another swingeing rent rise from the Armed Forces Pay Review Body.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the extra cost incurred by the Ministry of Defence—it is hundreds of millions of pounds—now that the married quarters have been sold off will be clawed back from the service families by doubling or tripling their rents over a period of time?

Mr. Brazier: No, I will not make that allegation because it would not be true. There is a clear commitment that service rents will be fixed by the AFPRB. After discussions between it and the Bett committee, which are minuted in Sir Michael Bett's report, and after reading the AFPRB's last report, it seems that it needs some steering from Ministers. We cannot become neutral on the issue of accompanied service in the two mobile services—the Army and the Air Force. It must surely be right to fix rents at a level that creates an incentive to officers and senior NCOs to keep their families with them.

I understand that there is a worrying trend among middle-ranking—and even some fairly senior—officers of leaving their families behind when they are posted to Germany or on tours to Northern Ireland. I have been told, although I have not been able to confirm it, that a brigade commander who is about to take up his post in Germany is leaving his family behind. I am not being critical of the individuals concerned, but there is something wrong with the incentive structure when that is happening. When young soldiers' wives in Germany see their husbands go off on unaccompanied tours to Bosnia, they want the reassurance that the wives of the command structure go too.

The matter is extremely important and I put it to my hon. Friend the Minister that, even if it means slightly smaller salary rises, the Government should ask the AFPRB to fix rents at a level that will provide an incentive to keep military communities together by encouraging accompanied service.

Mr. Viggers: May I remind my hon. Friend that commanders who are offered service housing suffer a penalty if their wives spend more than a certain number of nights a year in their quarters? That often means that the commander will encourage his wife not to be there most of the year but to live elsewhere and to visit only on special occasions. Does he agree that that is disadvantageous to service discipline abroad?

Mr. Brazier: Yes, I thoroughly agree.

The implication in the Armed Forces Pay Review Body report and the Bett report that we should be neutral on whether we have accompanied service as we move towards what they regard as fair rents less a discount—a discount of 38 per cent. is built in for the disadvantages of service life—seems totally wrong. I strongly suggest that the Government should try to fix the allowance structure and rents especially to encourage accompanied service.

My third point on personnel concerns reserves. The House has heard me speak at some length on this subject, as I know has my hon. Friend the Minister. There have been two very important advances this year. The welcome Reserve Forces Act 1996 will make it much easier for people such as those serving in the reserve force in Bosnia to do so flexibly. In addition, the announcement that the reserve forces will have a bigger say in their own future with the appointment next year of a reservist on a part-time basis as the next director of reserves is also welcome. I hope that my hon. Friend has some news on when that appointment is likely to take place.

Having read the report from the Pentagon on the role of reserves, and considering it has managed to save so much money by finding so many more roles for reserves, who after all cost less than a fifth of their regular counterparts, I cannot help feeling that reserves must be

[Mr. Brazier]

part of the key to ensuring that the best equipment remains affordable. Whole categories of activity have been taken over by reservists in America, ranging from legal services and aerial rescue services to two thirds of their airlift capability. We are doing some of that, but we could do much more.

My final point on personnel concerns almost the only point with which I agreed with the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid)—indeed it was almost the only point that was raised in all Opposition Members' speeches with which I agreed. It concerns the staff college. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is deeply concerned about the issue and that he is taking a close personal interest in it. The armed forces, and the Army in particular, are deeply worried by the uncertainty about the staff college. Even if it is impossible in the short term to find a tri-service site that is big enough and usable, the present temporary arrangements cannot continue indefinitely. It would be much better to send the Army back to Camberley, where it has some of the best purpose-built facilities in the world, than to allow the uncertainty and the temporary arrangements to continue.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was absolutely right to confirm yesterday that it is the Conservative party that believes profoundly in the core capability of our armed forces to defend us and deter a high-intensity war. He put his money where his mouth is by placing a number of essential orders over the summer. I urge the House to approve the defence estimates.

6.46 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): In the first part of his speech, the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) was desperate to manufacture threats. We were told during the cold war that the Soviet Union constituted the greatest possible threat. We are now told that there are much worse threats. It seems that any excuse—the country can go to ruins—can be used just so long as we buy the next weapons system.

The cold war led to a nuclear arms race that brought the world to the brink of destruction. The stock of those weapons, upgraded by this and other Governments, still has the potential for vast destruction. With the cold war over, there is an opportunity for significant nuclear disarmament, but it is being squandered by the Government.

It is a scandal that this country's nuclear weapons policy has not been properly revisited. Britain should not be basing its defence policy on nuclear weapons. Many distinguished British defence experts such as Lord Carver agree. The Government's deterrent argument does not stand up, except for the Saddam Husseins and other nuclear proliferators, who can use exactly the same argument as that deployed by the Secretary of State yesterday simply by deleting the word "Britain" and inserting the name of their own country.

The nuclear weapons programme has sucked up far more resources than has ever been acknowledged. It costs far more than has been declared. Nuclear weapons are the biggest single hidden cost in British history. Such opacity continues today, and even some senior Opposition Members believe the Government's line that, by the next election, 98 per cent. of expenditure on Trident will have been completed. That is plainly wrong. Ninety-eight per cent. of procurement or capital costs may have been spent or committed by then, but that ignores the running costs, which may double or treble the procurement costs over the next 25 years, not to mention the decommissioning costs.

To get some idea of how much nuclear weapons really cost, I tabled a series of parliamentary questions, asking why British defence expenditure is so much higher than that of the average of other European members of NATO. First, I asked what were the main functions carried out by our armed forces which were not carried out by those of other European members of NATO. On 16 April I was told that those functions were the provision of the so-called nuclear deterrent, overseas garrisons and support for the General Officer Commanding (Northern Ireland). That seemed a useful start. I then asked what was the estimated annual cost of each of those functions.

On 17 May I was told that maintaining the so-called nuclear deterrent should cost no more than about £200 million a year, that overseas garrisons cost some £360 million a year to maintain and that the General Officer Commanding (Northern Ireland) cost some £525 million a year—a total of some £1,080 million annually.

Armed with this information, I then asked for the latest official comparisons between the UK's expenditure on defence and the average expenditure of the other European members of NaTO. The answer given to me on 12 June was fascinating. It showed that we spend three times as much on defence in purely financial terms as the average for our European allies. When those figures are calculated as a proportion of gross domestic product, it turns out that the declared expenditure for the three extra roles is a fraction more than 0.1 per cent. of UK GDP. Bearing in mind the fact that the UK spends 3.1 per cent. of its GDP on defence, and that the European average is 2.3 per cent., roughly 0.7 per cent.—or £5 billion a year—of UK GDP is still effectively unaccounted for. Incidentally—this relates to the ten-minute Bill that I introduced earlier today—£5 billion is 32 times the sum needed to reduce class sizes to 30 pupils in every school.

Where has this money gone? The major roles not undertaken by other European armed forces have been taken into account. Assuming that there is no major fraud in the Ministry of Defence, the money must be being spent on something. I suggest that a fair chunk of it goes to support Britain's nuclear weapons infrastructure. It is time that the Government came clean about it. It smacks not only of excessive secrecy but of poor management.

Eighteen out of 21 major defence projects examined by the National Audit Office had slippage on their in-service dates. I put that down to poor management. The NAO reported that 23 major defence projects had increased in cost to the end of last year by a total of £695 million, the equivalent of another four and a half years of reduced class sizes. The fact that there was supposedly no protective equipment in the Gulf for personnel spraying pesticides when a simple facelet—never mind all the chemical warfare equipment—would have been adequate was surely, again, poor management.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces said on television that, if British business were run like the armed forces, the British economy would be like Japan's. I disagree. Any business run by an MOD-type of incompetent management would have called in the receivers years ago.

A classic example of poor management by the MOD has to be the replacement of a single aircraft. On 16 May 1995, a Nimrod aircraft crashed into the sea off the coast of Scotland following engine failure. This was not one of the famous maritime reconnaissance aircraft so often used for fisheries protection or search and rescue operations, but a version of the Nimrod called an R1 which entered service in July 1974 but was not publicly acknowledged until this decade. Until the crash, there were three of these aircraft in service.

The Nimrod R1 was designed for a specific role—to fly close to Soviet airspace so that the Soviet air defence radar would track it. In doing this, the R1 would gather information useful in helping the Royal Air Force V-bomber force to penetrate the Soviet radar screen to deliver nuclear weapons. In recent years, two significant things have happened to change that scenario. First, the Soviet Union, like the cold war, no longer exists. Secondly, the RAF will no longer carry nuclear weapons from 1998.

It therefore came as a surprise to discover, as I did through parliamentary questions, that this wasteful Tory Government are planning to replace the crashed aircraft at a cost of some £30 million. In addition, the new aircraft and the two existing ones are to be upgraded through a programme called Star Window, at a cost of another £30 million. That is on top of an annual running cost of more than £7 million for 51 Squadron which operates the R1. Millions of pounds are to be spent on this cold war relic. No announcement was made to Parliament about it—the information had to be dragged out of the MOD. What is the money for?

The Ministry should be more open about what the aircraft might be used for—£60 million is a high price to pay for a cold war dinosaur. While I am dealing with openness—

Mr. Brazier: I have been trying to follow the hon. Gentleman's argument. He mentioned a cold war dinosaur. Many of his colleagues have been saying that we should be doing more about the problems in Iraq and should be more concerned about the massacre of Iraqi civilians by Saddam Hussein. Highly capable aircraft are necessary to do that, so is the hon. Gentleman in fact saying that we should not be involved at all but should leave it to the Americans?

Mr. Cohen: This is not the time to have a full debate about Iraq, but I think that the problem would have been much better solved politically. Had we not sold Saddam Hussein armaments before the Gulf war—as the Conservative Government did—we would have been in a much better position.

Mr. Corbyn: Does my hon. Friend recall that, even a year after Saddam Hussein carried out the Halabja massacre, the British Ministry of Defence was sponsoring the Baghdad arms fair? That was a naked attempt to sell British arms to a regime that had already massacred Kurdish people in the disgusting attack on Halabja and which was already perpetuating the most appalling human rights abuses. The Ministry of Defence put arms sales ahead of its concern for human rights in Iraq then, and I believe that it is doing the same in other parts of the world, including Saudi Arabia, now.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend is right. I have not heard any Labour or, indeed, any Conservative Member suggest that another Gulf war operation should be mounted against Iraq. I think that that answers the hon. Gentleman's point.

During a debate on the RAF on 2 May 1991, I raised the question of low flying during the Gulf conflict. I said then:

"the problem did not relate to the bravery of the pilots, which was beyond argument; the problem related to the tactics laid down by the Ministry of Defence."—[*Official Report*, 2 May 1991; Vol. 190, c. 484.]

I argued that low flying was the wrong technique to be used in the circumstances. I was criticised for saying that both by my Front-Bench colleagues and by Conservative Members.

Over time, however, more information has become available, most notably from Sir Peter de la Billière, the British commander in the Gulf war. He said that the MOD did not want to abandon low-level attacks, as that

"would impact on the RAF's strategy developed for Europe."

Sir Peter had wanted to abandon low-level attacks because the casualty rate was too high, but had been overruled by London. He had particularly harsh words for an individual he described as

"a senior officer in the RAF",

and feels "extremely resentful" about

"the authoritarian way he tried to impose his view."

John Keegan, the defence editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, wrote in that paper on 14 January this year that the senior officer who exerted his authority over Sir Peter was

"acting under the influence of a doctrine that had lost its point."

Keegan concluded his article by saying:

"Doctrinal rigidity is a defect of which armed forces must cure themselves at all costs."

Alan Clark, replying for the Government in the 1991 debate, said that the United Kingdom

"had the only air force capable of positive runway denial on Iraqi airfields".—[*Official Report*, 2 May 1991; Vol. 190, c. 521.]

That was patently incorrect, as Sir Peter said in his book on the war. Sir Peter also stated that Chuck Horner, coalition air force commander,

"considered our method of operation a pretty crazy one in this environment".

While it is odd for me to agree with a Gulf war commander, I feel a certain comfort in having my then unpopular views vindicated.

The weapon used in the Gulf by the RAF to attack runways—the JP233—is to be replaced, although there is no word yet about exactly what will replace it. Will the Government learn the lessons of the Gulf war and choose a system that will not be dangerous to the pilots who, one day, may have to use it?

The other issue that must be taken into account in replacing the JP233 is that of anti-personnel mines. Considering the international uproar in recent years, I hope that the Government will ensure that any anti-runway system considered does not include anti-personnel as a part of it—as the JP233 does. My fear is that Ministry of Defence inertia will lead to the same mistakes being made, and that the JP233 replacement will have the same faults and the same mines as the JP233.

[Mr. Cohen]

In next year's debate on the defence estimates, my colleagues and I will be speaking from the Government Benches. I hope that a change of Government will also lead to a change in Government culture—for greater openness and fewer mistakes, much less money wasted and fewer immoral decisions.

7 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen)—who is, even now, being congratulated by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). Occasionally the hon. Member for Leyton and I tour galleries and exhibitions together as members of the all-party arts and heritage group, and I much enjoy those visits. I must, however, say that he is profoundly mistaken and totally wrong in most of his comments in this debate. I speak not only of his comments on the Gulf war, but, particularly, of those on the cold war.

The hon. Member for Leyton seems to have learnt absolutely nothing from the end of the cold war. He seems not to have realised that plans have been found, and confirmed as authentic, for the invasion of western Europe. That was the purpose of the Warsaw pact armies. Those armies were not there because they enjoyed it, but for the purpose of invading western Europe. There was, and there still is, no doubt about that. I am sorry that he has learnt nothing from the collapse of the Warsaw pact.

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend will be aware that the 7th Armoured Brigade recently conducted a major exercise in Poland, which I visited on several occasions. On two occasions I met the general who would have commanded the Polish army in the event of such an operation against western Europe, and he was quite free in telling me exactly what their tasks were. Those tasks were exactly as described by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Robathan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments, but, unfortunately, the hon. Member for Leyton refuses to believe them. He believes that all those Soviet and Warsaw pact officers were cuddly teddy bears, merely enjoying themselves in eastern Europe.

Mr. Cohen: The hon. Gentleman is again making the point that I ascribed to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier): that the threat from the Soviet Union in the cold war was the greatest that it could possibly be. But the Soviet Union and the cold war no longer exist. Why do we need all these new weapons systems now?

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Gentleman has made my point for me, because, before the end of the cold war, he was asking why we needed nuclear weapons systems. He asked that then, and I am sure that he would admit it.

It is always interesting to see the second amendment on defence debates. The second amendment on today's Order Paper is supported by 7.5 per cent. of Labour Members. One Labour Member in 13 is willing to go on the record—never mind those who are not willing to go on the record—as saying that they support

"the call for the scrapping of Trident as an essential step towards eliminating nuclear weapons world-wide . . . and to end the United Kingdom's involvement in the conventional arms trade".

The Opposition have the nerve to call Conservative Members divided.

Yesterday we listened to the shadow defence spokesman, the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), berating the Government for making cuts in defence expenditure and saying how a Labour Government—God forbid—would have done better. It was unfortunate that he could not see the glum faces on the Opposition Back Benches behind him, as Conservative Members could.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): Is the hon. Gentleman implying that he is in favour of an arms race?

Mr. Robathan: I have said nothing of the kind. I am not in favour of an arms race. I am saying that I am in favour of the good defence of this realm, as are all Conservative—but, sadly, not all Opposition—Members.

The debate has, as always, ranged wide over defence matters. My hon. Friend the Minister will know that I have not always been in 100 per cent. agreement with Government defence policy, and that I have viewed with regret reductions in the armed forces over the past four years. I fear that we may yet live to regret those reductions. I am, however, delighted that there is now a firm commitment that there will be no real cuts in the defence budget in this Parliament. Defence has taken huge cuts in this decade, and the cuts in no other Department could compare with those cuts. The defence budget should now be exempt.

I should like to speak briefly on the subject of Gulf war syndrome. I am not a doctor or a scientist, but I was in the Gulf during the war and speak from some limited personal experience. There were some very unpleasant injections against anthrax and bubonic plague. Vile pills were administered, and, more conventionally, one was expected to take paludrin against malaria. The Gulf was astonishingly cold, often very wet, and, inevitably, we got very dirty. I was in a staff job, so I spent very little time digging trenches, which makes one very dirty—*[Interruption.]* One might say "idle".

Gulf war syndrome may exist, and it certainly needs to be investigated. It is a very serious matter, as the hon. Member for South Shields mentioned yesterday, and all members of the armed forces deserve to be looked after properly if they have contracted anything during their service. For that reason, I welcome the research programme that will be overseen by the Medical Research Council.

The Gulf war was, however, a war, and one must ask what priorities an army should have in war. Yesterday an hon. Member mentioned out-of-date gas mask canisters. The important test is whether those canisters were still working, and not the date that was stamped on them. I have been known to eat out-of-date food from supermarkets, as I am sure all hon. Members must have done.

The desert can be notoriously dirty and full of flies. All manner of disease, such as typhus and dysentery, is spread by flies. On many occasions in past campaigns, casualties and mortalities from disease have been much higher than anything the enemy inflicted. Surely, therefore, the need to ensure a healthy and protected force must have been very high on the list of priorities.

Some of the accusations and claims that are being bandied about seem, at best, to be disingenuous. I smell a co-ordinated campaign by lawyers looking for a bandwagon—which is not to belittle the sufferers of various illnesses. Those illnesses, however, do not necessarily confirm the existence of a Gulf war syndrome.

Yesterday I spoke to a friend who had been very ill on his return from the Gulf. He is still serving in the Army and is now, I am delighted to say, fully recovered. He believes that he caught a very debilitating viral infection in the Gulf from being near a sewage works. He took two years to recover from what doctors believe was post-viral fatigue. He told me, first, that he was very well cared for by the armed forces, which is gratifying. Secondly, however—notwithstanding his two years of illness—he told me that he does not believe that he had Gulf war syndrome, if such a syndrome exists.

The nature of Gulf war syndrome seems to change. Organophosphates were not mentioned, at least within my hearing, until very recently. Organophosphates seem to be very dangerous, and I have certainly heard anecdotal evidence from sheep farmers in my constituency in Leicestershire which leads me to think that I would not like to deal with such a substance.

During my military career I spent much time in the tropics, and I recall machines—known as swing fogs—which spread pyrethrum around tents, buildings and people. I understand that swing fogs were particularly effective against flying insects, and I believe that they were used also in the Gulf.

My unit ran a prisoner-of-war camp in northern Saudi Arabia, at Al Quasumah. We had 8,000 prisoners of war pass through the camp, and there were approximately 600 British soldiers there. The weather was getting hotter by the middle of March, but there was never any real disease in the camp, which is a tribute to the high standards of hygiene imposed. The Iraqis came in unhealthy. Some of them had lice, often they were dehydrated and undernourished, and they were certainly dirty and demoralised.

I particularly remember seeing one rather pathetic child of 16 or 17 who had been shot in the foot by an officer on his own side to instil discipline. We fed them, we watered them and we gave treatment to them. I think we sprayed their tents as well—I am sure that we must have done—and we sent them on their way smiling. I have photographs to prove it. They certainly seemed healthy when they left.

I do not know what spray was used around the camp, but I understood that it might have been an organophosphate called malathion. As a precautionary measure against disease, we burnt the camp, but, as far as I am aware, no Coldstream guardsman who was guarding the camp has complained of having Gulf war syndrome.

I remember being told when I was an army cadet as a boy that Army tea had bromide in it to reduce sexual urges. Other hon. Members may recall that. Will my hon. Friend the Minister tell me whether that is true and whether I have drunk any bromide?

Mr. Soames: Not only is it true, I understand that it is compulsory in the Conservative party today.

Mr. Robathan: I thank my hon. Friend for that. Sadly, it did not work in the Army and nor does it work in the Conservative party, if reports are true. It certainly did not curb the excesses of the rude and licentious soldiery.

During 15 years in the Army, I was exposed to CS gas at least a dozen times. It was part of training. I am now told that it is terribly dangerous—too dangerous to be sprayed in the face of criminals. It was not too dangerous to be used on soldiers in training. It was not pleasant, but I do not seem to have suffered any ill effects and my eyesight is still relatively good, as I can see all the Liberal Democrats sitting on the Benches opposite. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they?"]

During my service, I was subjected to endless injections. Some of them were very painful, especially the gamma globulin injection for hepatitis, which was delivered to the bottom. On exercises abroad, colleagues of mine went down with malaria, leishmaniosis, leptospirosis and other unpleasant diseases. They were real, identified diseases. I fear that that is part of military service and travelling abroad. Those colleagues were extremely well treated and cared for and, when necessary, were given drugs to combat the diseases.

What is Gulf war syndrome? We need to know what it is and whether it really exists. There is a lingering suspicion in my mind that it is a litigious ploy by cynical lawyers in the United States, and some here, using the suffering of others as a means to their own reward.

I welcome the defence estimates, and I particularly welcome the research programme into Gulf health issues, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister and others will not be influenced by the high-profile and opportunistic campaign on Gulf war syndrome.

7.12 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Bromide or not, I believe that we are right in thinking that the wife of the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) is expecting a happy event in the next month or two. We therefore wish them well.

I should like to raise five issues succinctly. Thanks to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, I was able, with a delegation from this House, to visit Nepal in January. We went to see Gurkha training at Pokharra. I was able to raise the subject with Sir Charles Guthrie—as did my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid)—when we were invited by the Army board to its first meeting in Edinburgh, where it was most welcome.

I should like to ask the same question of the Minister as I asked of Sir Charles Guthrie: what do the Government see as the future of the Gurkhas? The official view in Nepal was that they valued the relationship greatly and wanted it to continue. Given the economic situation in Nepal, there are many reasons why it should be continued. What is the Government's policy?

I also have a sub-question in brackets. In his opening speech yesterday, the Secretary of State for Defence referred to Exercise Flying Fish. I do not say that I am necessarily unhappy about it, but what is the assessment of the effect that it will have on the Chinese? We are told that it is the biggest exercise to be held in Asia for a long time. What precisely is the purpose of it? Is it just all about the Gurkhas in Brunei and our relations with Singapore or Malaysia? How will it be interpreted in Peking? It could be an expensive and provocative exercise in terms of China.

My second question concerns the Ministry's policy on prisons and land. I think that my hon. Friends from Scotland know that all sorts of rumours are flying around

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

that Ministry of Defence lands will be made available at relatively cheap prices to those who are to run prisons on a private basis. I refer particularly to the Kirknewton site. I do not know whether the rumours are true, but the question ought to be referred to, possibly by letter. There must be a clear policy on Ministry of Defence lands if they are to be sold off, particularly for private prisons—a concept which some of us find totally wrong.

My third question concerns the case that I raised with the Secretary of State during his opening speech. He gave a serious answer, promising to look into it. I refer to the case of Colin Wallace. The difficulty is that the great great grandfather—ministerially—of the Secretary of State is probably responsible. Present Ministers and civil servants have inherited a problem from long, long ago. But—this is a very big but, and a House of Commons point—how is it that, at this stage, information can come to light which persuades the Court of Appeal to give a judgment which, frankly, bears out what my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) and I were trying to tell the House in 1989 and on 12 February 1990, at column 114?

In an Adjournment debate on 27 June 1989, my hon. Friend and I were savagely rubbished by the then Minister, the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten). One does not object to being criticised in this House, but to be criticised so ferociously and in such a derogatory manner when it turns out that the Court of Appeal is upholding precisely what we were trying to say really is a bit rich. I have with me the wad of questions—heavens, there are more than 200 of them! If hon. Members, asking the right questions—spot-on questions—receive answers which turn out, in the view of the Court of Appeal, to be inadequate, how can we be persuaded that proper attention is given not to the odd buckshee question but to repeated, detailed questioning?

That brings me to my fourth issue, which concerns what happened in the Gulf war.

Mr. Soames: Will the hon. Gentleman forgive me if I see to it that he receives a reply on the matter of Colin Wallace from the Home Secretary? I am not able to deal with the issue. Also, may I reply to him on Kirknewton by letter, because I do not have the facts at my fingertips?

Mr. Dalyell: There ought to be a Government reply. I have never been difficult on the subject of which senior Minister replies. It is an area between the Northern Ireland Office, the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence. I would find it totally acceptable if the Home Secretary, as a senior Minister, responded. The matter has reached a stage at which the Government should give an undertaking that the Home Secretary, rather than a junior Minister, will consider it.

On the question of what happened in the Gulf war, I refer to a letter sent to a number of hon. Members on 4 October by the Minister for the Armed Forces, which stated:

"We have now established that certain OP pesticides (other than malathion) were also used in the Gulf: these were dimethyl phosphorthionate, diazinon and azamathiphos. We are conducting urgent investigations into the extent of use of such pesticides and I will write to you once we have a clearer picture on this."

I am loth to criticise what happened in the Gulf, because it may be that everything was done in a hurry. In addition, I do not doubt the good faith of Ministers—other than to ask, what on earth were their scientific advisers doing in relation to these questions? Almost anyone with a knowledge of chemistry knows that there should be a red alert as soon as these substances are involved, and people should have been saying, "Hey! What's this?"

I am not being wise after the event, but the chemicals involved ought to have sounded warning signals. Why, after all this time, did they not send such signals, in the light of the questioning on the matter? I return to a point that I made during the speech of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell)—if there had been a hot situation in Iraq in August or September 1996, heaven help us. Are we sure that the same thing would not have happened? It is no good covering over the past, because we want to know what will happen in the future.

Paragraph 7 of the Minister's letter states:

"We are now urgently re-examining the records of those who have attended the medical assessment programme and have exhibited a specific range of symptoms to establish whether or not their health is likely to have been affected".

I think that that re-examination ought to have taken place many moons ago, but I accept that the Minister for the Armed Forces will report in good faith everything that he knows to the House.

I wish to refer to a minority view on what we ought to do about the situation in Iraq, but it would be inappropriate for me to argue the issue in detail as I have in Adjournment and other debates. I think that we ought to remove sanctions forthwith, and talk to them. However, it is legitimate to ask in this debate how long the Tornado patrols will continue. I fear that, sooner or later, there will be an attack from Iraq or—more likely—a malfunction. These things happen, as we know; something similar happened just off Blackpool during the Labour party conference. Heaven help us if there is a malfunction in the desert.

Defence Ministers ought to have listened to what Flight Lieutenant Nicol—a pilot who was shot down in the Gulf—said on Radio Leeds, during a programme on which I and the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) were invited. We hope that, if there was a malfunction, pilots would eject. If they eject, we hope that they land without losing their lives. They would then almost certainly be captured, and my fear is that they would be paraded with maximum television coverage, with CNN in attendance, through the streets of downtown Baghdad.

What do we do then? I hope that we will not automatically threaten the kind of missile attack that was talked about in August and September, because that raises all sorts of questions about our obligations to the UN. I register extreme unhappiness about any missile attack on Iraq—let alone those that are not agreed by members of the Security Council.

The justification for the previous operation in 1990—whether one agreed with it or not—was that it was a UN operation. It is a different matter when one goes ahead on the basis of Anglo-American decision-making. What is the Government's attitude to operations not agreed by China, the Soviet Union or France, for heaven's sake? When there is that kind of unhappiness among other nations, are we justified in going ahead with the Americans?

Having been to Iraq—rightly or wrongly—three years after the Gulf war, I can say that we are getting ourselves into a position where we are simply being hated by a

whole generation of a people with whom we had far better trading relations than the Americans had. People ought to remember that the best trading partners in the Arab world for Britain were the Libyans, against whom we have sanctions, and the Iraqis. It is very little skin off the noses of the Americans commercially that sanctions are imposed on those countries.

Finally, during the recess, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and I asked for Parliament to be recalled when it looked as if there was to be another Gulf war. We asked the Prime Minister this question:

"To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his letter to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield and the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 9 September, if he will state the conditions in which he believes the public interest requires Parliament to be recalled, with particular reference to the involvement of British personnel on active service".

The Prime Minister replied:

"A decision to recall Parliament depends upon the prevailing situation. It is made after consultation with colleagues and through the usual channels."—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1996; Vol. 282, c. *649-650*.]

Some of us think that, as soon as it is clear that this House might be sending British service men into military action, the House of Commons ought to be recalled to discuss the matter before any irrevocable steps are taken.

7.27 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) is a very good reason why nobody can trust Labour on defence, as he—along with 20 colleagues—signed an amendment calling for one-sided nuclear disarmament that would, in effect, render this country totally defenceless.

I take issue with the opening remarks yesterday by the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), who painted a bleak picture of poor morale in the services. That is simply not the case, as I have seen for myself.

I am now a third of the way through my parliamentary armed services scheme, attached to the Army. I must say that it has been an eye-opening experience. I have always been a great admirer of our armed forces, and I have never doubted their great professionalism, but to see it in practice is a humbling experience. I do not believe that anyone realises how hard they work. The pace is killing, with back-to-back training, exercises, deployment and retraining. Those magnificent men and women are deeply committed, and are proud of their work. As a result, they are the flag carriers for Great Britain plc all over the world.

In a deeply dangerous world, with many interests of our own to protect, besides our commitments to international forces, are we perhaps asking too much of our services and giving them too small a share of the national budget? After all, the services are an extension of our foreign policy. Our men are deployed in a broader range of tasks promoting our interests than at any other time in the past 50 years. But commanding officers tell me that "can do" has reached its limits. They cannot ask more of their men, because there are simply not enough hours or days available. Overstretch is being caused by asking too much of them and giving them an ever reducing share of the budget in real terms.

Although I agree with the Select Committee's comments, I believe it would be helpful if Ministers assured us that this year's defence estimates will not again be undermined by any more defence cuts in the forthcoming Budget. The importance of such an assurance cannot be overstated. For years, we have been cutting the allocation given to defence spending in real terms. The truth is that we went too far, and are now paying the price.

I appreciate the fact that we are now deeply committed to arms procurement, amounting to about 39 per cent. of our defence budget. That is most important in the modern world. The fact that we allocate to defence only a fraction more than the average NATO country is not a fair barometer, however. The fact is that our well-being depends to a greater extent on international trade and investment, which need protecting. In short, a military presence is an extension of our foreign policy, and it is short-sighted to cut our best British export.

I welcome the fact that underspend can be carried forward, but in the final analysis that just scratches the surface. Some of the money has already been allocated to procurement, but not all of it. There have been some unexpected savings.

I issue a special plea for more resources to be put into recruitment. We face a serious manning problem, and I share colleagues' concern at the shortfall of 4,000 recruits to the Army. These manning problems do affect our operational ability; they also affect the stability of families, because so much more is being asked of the men already in the services. I am aware, too, that the Navy and the Royal Air Force face recruitment shortfalls.

The problem began when we made extensive cuts under "Options for Change" as a short-term economy measure, without recognising the long-term effects. One very damaging such effect has been on the Army's image, and hence its ability to recruit. It has been seen as a career in decline. We also cut money for the usual recruitment methods too severely: the closure of some high street recruiting offices, the ending of the junior leaders, and so on. I say: hats off to the present Adjutant General, Sir Michael Rose, who is a man not lacking in determination. But in my view he needs a bigger budget to enable him to tackle this problem boldly.

We must also return to high-profile advertising. We need more high street recruiting offices—I do not believe that leaflets in job centres are good enough. They are woefully inadequate. Employment officers in Sutton tell me that it is not their job to promote the services above any other career. We therefore need to market the modern Army. Schools must be encouraged to start their own combined cadet forces—I regret to say that very few have them. Careers officers and advisers should promote the armed services as a positive career instead of sidelining them. We need to show that life in the Army is relevant. What is more, the Army is an extremely good employer.

Joining the Army today means acquiring skills and training that may prove useful when the soldier leaves. I hope that it will be possible for soldiers to acquire NVQs in much the same way as people can in the police force. The false image of the infantry is that it consists of people with fixed bayonets charging around digging ditches. Wrong. The modern infantryman is a technical person, using complex weapons and vehicle systems.

The Army teaches valuable skills and habits, instilling discipline, motivation, commitment, loyalty and initiative—all qualities essential to future employers. Above all, the Army provides valuable support for young

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people from broken families and disadvantaged backgrounds. It gives them a stability that they have never had before.

It is important to concentrate on methods of training. Some have become too rigorous and demanding for today's young people, who have grown up with very little sport. They arrive in the Army quite unfit and with poor muscle tone. They have lived lives of junk food and computer games. When I visited Bassingbourn training regiment, I discovered that the training timetable can be set back because of sprained muscles.

Perhaps it would be better to lengthen the training period to give young people to time to adjust to what is required instead of racing them along and creating serious problems. Ultimately, the result is what matters. Quite often, a young man who shambles into the Army wearing an earring and long hair surprises himself and turns into a fine soldier.

I am not talking just about initial training; high-intensity training is also of the utmost importance. In the course of my parliamentary armed services scheme, I visited the Army training unit at Suffield in Canada. The high-intensity training undergone there is clearly a must for a modern army. It is rigorous and demanding.

The soldiers spend three weeks out on the prairie night and day in all conditions—below zero in autumn and spring, or temperatures soaring into the forties in summer. The exercise is intended to simulate as closely as possible the real thing, within the bounds of safety. I certainly hope that there will never be any cuts in such training. I have watched the combined forces there wheeling across the prairie, engaging in live firing and generally charging around. I have seen how highly effective such forces can be.

At the same unit, adventure training is experienced, giving every young man the chance to see whether he can go beyond what he thought was his limit. I myself was put through a free-fall parachute jump. I never believed I could do it, but I did. I trust that this high-intensity training will be regarded as sacrosanct.

There is a danger that, with so much peacekeeping to be done, our military capability to fight a war may ultimately be damaged. Focusing too much on peacekeeping work might lead to a loss of fighting skills. There are likely to be many more peacekeeping missions, and soldiers will undoubtedly find them rewarding, but we must never lose sight of the skills needed for high-intensity war—skills that cannot be learned overnight. Such skills are an insurance policy for our future security. The threats are still out there, and we must always be prepared for them.

As we approach a general election, I hope that the electorate will study carefully the widely contrasting approaches to the defence of our country by the Government—the Conservative party—and old Labour, real Labour. The Opposition's commitment to a strategic defence review is a masquerade for radical defence cuts—we should make no bones about that—because they have a wide social agenda that must be paid for. Nobody can trust Labour, and it would be folly for anybody ever to think of doing so.

I am enormously proud of the Government for their commitment to giving our magnificent fighting forces the support they need. I have no doubt, and no hesitation, in supporting and approving the defence estimates.

7.40 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): It has been an interesting debate thus far, but I cannot be the only person who was appalled by the sense of levity surrounding the contribution from the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) about the use of poisons in Iraq. The story coming out about the use of organophosphates in Iraq, and the damage done to so many people, resembles the measures used against the nuclear test veterans from 1955, whose case was ignored for so long. In too many such cases, the Ministry of Defence turns a blind eye and refuses to discuss the problem. It is not right that the House should be laughing and joking when such matters are raised.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) talked about the joy of physical education and forcing people to be physically stronger. She should think about some of the reasons why some of our young people have appalling physiques. Is it anything to do with the cuts in physical education in schools and the sale of school playing fields? Those policies have led to a lack of exercise or any opportunities for games for so many inner-city children.

Why do they sit in front of computer screens and televisions all day? Because the youth centre down the road has been closed because the Government will not fund it. We should be realistic—social problems are not solved by forcing people into the armed forces, which is the agenda that the hon. Lady appears to want.

This debate takes place at the end of the 20th century, after the horrors of two world wars and with another 20 million dead from conventional wars since the end of the second world war. What are we doing? We are talking about enemies and about arming ourselves for real wars. Conservative Member after Conservative Member has said that we must not concentrate too much on peacekeeping, because we must get ready for a war; but nobody has produced an analysis of the origin of any supposed threat.

From the experience of recent years, including the Gulf war, we must ask ourselves some hard questions. What were we doing arming Saddam Hussein? Why did we ignore the systematic abuse of human rights in Iraq, while we sold arms and military-related equipment to that country? We are currently arming Saudi Arabia to the teeth, even though we know that that country has an appalling and abominable record on human rights, which many in the House dare not mention, because they do not want to upset the arms market.

Our obsession with selling arms around the world is poisoning our attitude to human rights abuses. That is why I am happy to append my name to the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith), which suggests cutting defence expenditure, recognises the problems of the obsession with selling arms and specifically draws attention to the World Court decision on nuclear weapons and the problems and real costs of the continuation of the Trident programme.

I find it very sad that the Secretary of State for Defence did not once, in a lengthy contribution, utter the words "comprehensive test ban treaty"—unless I missed them—nor did he mention the problems surrounding the ratification of that treaty because of the attitudes of Britain and France. France undertook all those nuclear tests last year, and Britain is extending its nuclear capability

through the construction of the fourth Trident nuclear submarine and the potential arming of up to 512 warheads.

Surely now, at the end of the 20th century, we should urgently consider getting the nuclear comprehensive test ban treaty ratified and start on the total elimination of nuclear weapons, as envisaged by President Gorbachev more than 10 years ago. He sadly lost office later, and could be described as one of the many victims of the cold war.

This year, we have had an historic decision. The International Court of Justice in The Hague, on 8 July, made one of the most important legal decisions it has been asked to make. The question put before the court was:

"Is the threat or use of nuclear weapons in any circumstances permitted under international law?"

The court advised:

"In view of the unique characteristics of nuclear weapons, their destructive capacity and capacity to cause untold human suffering and damage for generations to come, their use in fact seems scarcely reconcilable with respect for the law applicable in armed conflict."

It concluded:

"the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law, applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law."

That decision is of profound significance. I find it depressing that the Secretary of State, despite my intervention, was unable even to refer to the decision of the International Court of Justice.

The court accepted that nuclear weapons would violate human rights and rejected the idea that environmental laws do not deal with war. In particular, paragraph 32 of its decision states that the general obligation on states

"to respect and protect the natural environment . . . applies to the actual use of nuclear weapons in armed conflict."

It accepted the view that, if the use of nuclear weapons is illegal, the threat of their use is also illegal. We see implicit threats of the use of nuclear weapons from the degree of arming—and indeed, from certain politicians at times, we hear explicit threats of the use of nuclear weapons.

The court also accepted that mere possession of nuclear weapons could be a threat. It accepted that nuclear-free zone treaties point towards eventual general abolition of war; that nuclear weapons are subject to the laws of war, specifically the non-use of weapons against civilians; that nuclear states are responsible for the incidental effects of nuclear weapons on neutral states; and that the five nuclear powers had failed to provide any basis to justify the limited use of nuclear weapons.

The court also declared that article VI of the non-proliferation treaty is an obligation on the nuclear states to achieve total nuclear disarmament. The court also refused to accept the case for the legality of low-yield nuclear weapons.

It is important to get those matters on the record. Some people have pontificated about the importance of the International Court of Justice, but when it says something that is not acceptable to the nuclear states they are strangely silent. I hope that the House will have opportunities to return to that matter in future, because it is important that we have that discussion.

Surely we will not enter the 21st century by preparing our capability for the total annihilation of the planet, when the real problems are the impoverishment of the south, the enrichment of the richest in the north and the consistent environmental destruction brought about by a global trading system that will lead to the loss of all our livelihoods in the long run.

The defence estimates make much, as Conservative Members often do, about the sale of arms around the world. I mentioned earlier the question of human rights abuses in countries to which we sell arms. At the moment, many people are concerned about the situation in Indonesia. I was delighted when the Nobel prize was awarded to the bishop in East Timor and to José Ramos Horta for his work in opposing the illegal occupation of East Timor.

Sadly, Britain is a major arms supplier to Indonesia, and that fact is used as a diplomatic bulwark by the regime in Jakarta to continue to oppress the Timorese people. Hawk aircraft have been used to bomb Indonesian villages, and if anyone doubts my word, they can meet people from East Timor, who can give chapter and verse on what happened.

We then have the question of arms exports by this country, their subsidy by the Ministry of Defence, and the amount spent on promoting the sale of arms. We appear to be spending an inordinate amount promoting arms sales. Indeed, 750 people are employed by the Defence Exports Services Organisation promoting arms sales, while only 1,000 people are employed by the Department of Trade and Industry to promote the other 98 per cent. of British exports around the world.

Our obsession with selling arms around the world blinds us to human rights abuses. Because of the sale of aircraft to Saudi Arabia, the British Government are in no position to criticise what goes on there, any more than what goes on in any other Gulf state or Indonesia. We are in no position to criticise the destruction of Diego Garcia and the removal of people from it 30 years ago because of our obsession with the arms industry, arms exports and—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman of the ten-minute limit on speeches.

7.50 pm

Rev. William McCrea (Mid–Ulster): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to speak in an important defence estimates debate. It will come as no surprise to the House that I have little in common with the views expressed by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). I shall approve the defence estimates before us as I believe that is the responsible position that hon. Members should take.

I wish to express my appreciation to the Secretary of State for the excellent equipment provided to our soldiers to allow them to fight aggressors and save lives, not only at home but worldwide. They are carrying out their duties with sensitivity and expertise. I join other hon. Members who have said that they are proud of our armed forces. I, too, am proud of their efforts.

This debate is overshadowed by the brutal and cruel murder of Warrant Officer James Bradwell as a result of the IRA bomb attack on the Army headquarters in Lisburn. I express my appreciation to all the men and women who serve in Northern Ireland with great expertise and tremendous courage in the face of a vile aggressor. No one can fully understand the pain and grief that

[Rev. William McCrea]

Warrant Officer James Bradwell's family experiences, except those who have been in the same valley of sorrow. No words will comfort his grieving family circle, but I trust that the expression of our sympathy will help them in the midst of their time of great bereavement. It was a dastardly murder, unjustified and blatantly sectarian.

It would be easy to leave our grieving at that and just move on, but the Government have a responsibility to bring to justice those who planned and perpetrated that carnage. The Ministry of Defence and the Government are responsible for explaining how such an attack was permitted to penetrate what was boasted to be the best protected Army headquarters in the United Kingdom. There is little point in spending vast sums of taxpayers' money on equipment and personnel if that manpower cannot be properly deployed to protect itself.

The blame for the attack cannot be placed on any soldier or mistake made in that Army base. It lies fairly and squarely with the IRA murderers, and that must be clearly stated. It also lies on the shoulders of their political masters, Adams and McGuinness. When Martin McGuinness was before the court in the Irish Republic in 1992, he said that he was very proud to have been the IRA commander in Londonderry, yet certain hon. Members wanted to parade Adams along the corridors of this House. Thankfully, the House was spared that incident and the nausea of witnessing the likes of those who will not utter a word of condemnation against the IRA murder gangs' activities but seek to hide under a cloak of some kind of democracy.

The Prime Minister has been strong in his condemnation of the bomb attack, as he should be; but the grave reality for him and his Government is that, had they heeded those who told them that the so-called "peace process" was started on a phoney premise and that it was a tactical move by the IRA to squeeze concessions from the Government, the security apparatus in Northern Ireland would not have dropped its guard. In that respect, the Government were foolish with the lives of their citizens in Northern Ireland. They relied on the groundless trust that they had developed with the Irish Government and through their contacts with IRA-Sinn Fein, which suggested that the IRA would not return to bombing Northern Ireland or to the bombing campaign on the mainland.

Well, the IRA has returned, and has returned with a vengeance. Instead of sobering up to the realities, the security forces and the civilian population are put further at risk by a policy of refusing to close the political door to Sinn Fein-IRA. The Government remain determined to bring the Provisional IRA into the process, despite the bombing. The bomb at Thiepval is not the first in the latest round of IRA bombings and, sadly, it will not be the last. The IRA will use any tactic—a phoney peace if that suits their game, or war—to achieve their goal of crushing the British in Ulster.

The Government have not faced that reality. They pretend that they can make a working assumption that the IRA means peace when it says it. They asked the IRA to say that there would be a "permanent" ceasefire, but it would not. The reality is that it could not say "permanent", because it did not mean it and had no intention of having a permanent ceasefire. I read a document in this House at the time saying that the IRA had an agenda to which it was working closely, and that it was not a genuine ceasefire.

The Government continue to implement a softly softly security policy in the light of the peace talks in Stormont. The 100 security concessions made to the IRA—that is not my claim but is boasted in a document produced by the Northern Ireland Office—have not been retracted. One would have thought that the Government would withdraw every concession that they made to the IRA in the course of a phoney truce, but those 100 concessions still stand, and the demand goes on for more. Not only are the Government inviting more trouble from the IRA but, by such a policy, they are preparing the ground for it to destroy Northern Ireland.

Others are in that messy deal as well. The Government have given in to pressure from America, Dublin and the IRA to make a deal with the IRA. They want a settlement no matter what the cost. In the past few weeks, we have seen that the price must be paid. It was paid by Warrant Officer Bradwell. Sadly, if measures sufficient to meet the needs in Northern Ireland are not taken against the murderers, it will be paid by many others before this process is done.

To the Government, the present process is about one thing: getting the IRA to the table. Sadly, Her Majesty's Opposition are playing the same game. The process is about Sinn Fein-IRA and its needs and aspirations—everyone else is secondary. The process is not progressing the aims of the Union—which I believe in and which the Prime Minister has stated so many times—and it is not about achieving decommissioning. My constituents were very hurt when they heard that, if guns were handed over by the IRA or other paramilitary organisations as part of an amnesty in Northern Ireland, they would not be tested ballistically. For example, when my cousin was murdered—when the IRA came to the door—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

8 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Like the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea), I honour the memory of Warrant Officer Bradwell. When I think about the emergency in Northern Ireland, I am filled with admiration for the professionalism and the discipline of the British soldiers in Northern Ireland. I do not think that any other nation could have coped with that challenge over so many years with such bravery, discipline and professionalism.

Two important aerospace factories and one RAF maintenance unit are located in my constituency and employ more than 4,000 people. Therefore, the Ministry of Defence and its Ministers have a huge influence, directly or indirectly, over employment and prosperity in the community that I represent. Ministers' decisions have crucial consequences in north-east Wales and in neighbouring Cheshire and Wirral communities. Ministry of Defence procurement can make or break the aerospace industry and clearly will decide the future of British Aerospace plc.

I turn first to RAF Sealand. I have explained my distaste for market testing as a commercial philosophy. However, as the Government insist on operating it, I am driven to state that RAF Sealand's in-house bid must win

against Brown and Root and GEC. Most of the United Kingdom's defence electronics industry wants RAF Sealand to remain under Government control, as whoever operates it has a stranglehold over the maintenance of most MOD combat systems. RAF Sealand maintains two thirds of RAF electronics work and critical Army and Navy systems.

I am pleased to announce that BAE Dynamics, Cossor, Racal Electronics plc, Lucas, Siemens and Shorts have joined the Sealand alliance to support the in-house bid. My 1,600 RAF constituents have achieved 35 per cent. more output with 14 per cent. fewer people. That is a brilliant achievement but, regrettably, £1 million was spent compiling the in-house bid. More money could have been saved for the taxpayer without the hassle of market testing.

I do not want to see more than 300 RAF service men forced to work under industry control. I think that there is a conflict of interest under market testing: does the service man do what is best for his line manager and the shareholder or what is best for the RAF and the taxpayer? That is the weakness of market testing. I state with great conviction that only the in-house bid enhances the Ministry of Defence's intelligent customer status. I am grateful to the Minister of State for Defence Procurement for his accessibility and his patience in allowing me to bring deputations to him on the matter.

The dark cloud of market testing has hung over RAF Sealand for more than two years. It has dampened spirits and impeded morale. There is good leadership at the base and co-operation from trade unions. With gritted teeth, they have saved the day so far. If the Government want RAF Sealand to remain a world-class outfit which supports the best flyers in the world, they must ensure that the in-house bid wins. If it works, please do not fix it.

I seek the Minister's help with another matter. Raytheon, a United States worldwide company, is located near RAF Sealand. The Raytheon service centre, which will remain after the other jobs are lost, would employ more survivors if the Ministry of Defence were to send its Dominee aircraft—effectively the Hawker jet—to my constituency for servicing. On behalf of my beleaguered constituents, I ask for Ministry of Defence contracts for the servicing of Dominee aircraft. If that were to happen, we could save many jobs and avoid compulsory redundancies.

Secondly, Ministers could assist by asking British Aerospace Airbus, which is recruiting across the runway from Raytheon Jets, to take on as many as possible of those who will soon be made redundant at Raytheon. I ask the Minister to use his undoubted influence in that area.

My third point refers to the future large aircraft. Has the programme moved forward? Has the European staff requirement set firm parameters for the aircraft in terms of size, shape, speed, range and propulsion—presumably turbo props? I believe that it has and I hope that the Minister will confirm that in his winding-up speech. Will the first delivery of the future large aircraft be made in May 2004, with a pre-launch phase from January 1997 to July 1998? I believe that that is so. Some 2,200 members of the airbus work force at Broughton in my constituency want some answers about that project.

When will the letter of intent from the eight future large aircraft nations become operative? It must be soon. What about work share? Will my constituents at Airbus Broughton be asked to build the wings of the aircraft? They build the wings for all the airbus aircraft and they are brilliantly successful. I hope that they will benefit if this project goes forward.

Have the air forces of Europe endorsed the future large aircraft as meeting operational requirements and equalling the capability of the American C17? My constituents remain concerned about budgetary problems in France and Germany regarding the future large aircraft. Perhaps the Euro currency is taking precedence in those two countries—I do not know. However, if France and Germany do not get a move on, the Americans may slip in and offer the Lockheed C17 as an alternative. That would be a terrible blow to the project.

I ask the Minister to ensure that the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of Trade and Industry are using all their diplomatic skills to get France and Germany to make an urgent commitment to that project. Do the Government believe that France and Germany will declare for the future large aircraft at their summit on 8 December? I hope that they will. They have dragged their feet so far and I think that the Americans are watching hungrily for their opportunity. If we went American again after the C120, my constituents would cry treason; they would have no patience with such a decision. My constituents want the British Government and the MOD to back a British, or at least a European, project.

My last words are to the Minister. I ask him to declare tonight, certainly before midnight, that the Government will order 40 to 50 of the FLA.

8.9 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): In the 10 minutes that I have, I had thought to address five defence themes for the next term of our Government. However, we have heard speeches of such importance that I cannot fail to respond to one or two points.

I have every sympathy with the argument of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) about the Raytheon jets facility. If the 32 Squadron HS125s that are stationed at Northolt in my constituency and have their third-line service elsewhere could be serviced at Hawarden, I should be delighted.

The speech of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) really brought home to the House the fact that the Labour party is not one party on defence. Labour and the Liberal Democrats are as one on defence, as they are on many things these days, but the Labour party is fundamentally divided within itself on the subject. The idea that the hon. Member for Islington, North and some of his hon. Friends are proposing about the merits of vulnerability is belied by all the experience of the past 20 years—the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviets because the Afghans were so weak, the invasion of the Falkland Islands, the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein, and the horrors perpetrated in Bosnia by the essentially Serbian-controlled Yugoslav national army—and yet Labour Members enjoin further vulnerability. The human misery that military weakness has caused should surely behove us to defend ourselves adequately.

The moving speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) brought home to us the reality of the situation of the people of Northern Ireland today. We are grateful to him and proud of the

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

loyal people of Northern Ireland. We also pay a warm tribute of gratitude to the warrant officer who was killed and to the many people who have made the supreme sacrifice in the defence of our country of Ulster.

We must get even further away from the Maginot mentality of static defence, the legacy of the cold war. We have done this to a large extent, but an armoured British division remains stationed in Germany with all the apparatus of a fixed military presence: the married quarters, the schools, the swimming pools, the gardeners, the mess stewards. In all—deliberately excluding the Headquarters Allied Rapid Reaction Corps—the whole apparatus costs the British taxpayer £943 million a year, of which £252 million is paid to locally employed civilians. We should be employing civilians in this country when so many bases are closing and so many facilities are folding.

With the money saved, we should be investing in extra mobility and flexibility, which are what war prevention requires. We have made some good investments: the C-130J, the EH101 medium transport helicopter and the improved Chinook mark 2. I hate to say it to my erstwhile friend—I say friend because we came into the House together, although he sits on the opposite side—the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside, but what the Royal Air Force requires is not the future large aircraft, which will cost a great deal to develop, but the C-17—a heavy lifter to take a main battle tank over huge ranges so that large loads can be deployed rapidly. I am pleased that the Select Committee, under the stewardship of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), is examining the issue of heavy lift.

Good investments are also being made for the Royal Marines: the landing platform docks Albion and Bulwark which are to be constructed, in addition to HMS Ocean with its landing platform for helicopters. Mobility is an important capability and we need to invest more in it.

We also need to invest more in training. I shall mention just one subject—the future of staff and officer cadet training. Most armed forces are investing more and more in training while we are doing the opposite. I hope that Her Majesty's Government will think again on Greenwich. The fact that the joint staff training scheme has not worked gives us an opportunity to go back to this old issue and, surely, locate the tri-service staff college at Greenwich. I would also put a tri-service cadet college in that august setting as a lead-in to the individual service academies.

We also need to make better use of our Reserves, as my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) said. I would add just one point about the opportunity afforded by the sponsored Reserve—the idea that contractors who are working for the support of the armed services can be mobilised in uniform in time of emergency or war. I hope, too, that the example set by No. 1 maritime headquarters unit of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force—located at RAF Northolt in my constituency—will be better followed. It provides support for the maritime headquarters at Northwood and I hope that it will provide support for the permanent joint headquarters at Northwood also.

My final point concerns procurement. If we are to have such small armed forces, they must be well trained and have an expansion capability with Reserves, but they must also have the very best equipment. This is crucial for flexibility and mobility. I mentioned some of the programmes. We have seen from the Eurofighter episode how bedevilled with politics some of the European programmes can become. In the case of Eurofighter, the problem was the nefarious ways of economic and monetary union and the fact that the Maastricht criteria appear to be more important to the German Parliament than the modernisation of the Luftwaffe and of the three other air forces which require the Eurofighter 2000. It is a frightening prospect, which is why it is so necessary to retain the balance between European procurement and co-operation with the United States. Without that balance, we shall never have a competitive indigenous industry of our own.

I return to the theme that I touched on briefly in a question to my hon. Friend the Minister of State during his opening remarks about the European armaments agency which is to be developed from the Franco-German agency as a quadripartite agency, to which we are supposedly to sign up. I beg my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government to think carefully. Do we really need another bureaucracy? Co-operation across frontiers should not be driven by officials in Bonn and Brussels.

In any case, are the new officials to be drawn from NATO or the national defence ministries? How are they to co-operate with the conference of national armaments directors within NATO? The latter is supposedly harmonising operational requirements not just for four European members but right across the alliance to secure proper interoperability and the best use of resources. To whom are the officials to be answerable? Are not our American friends correct in assuming that there must at any rate be a predisposition to favour the European product over an American or other purchase?

Ministers must think very carefully. Is the multi-role armoured utility vehicle the right project to get the agency off the ground? We have good vehicle constructors in this country, including GKN, Alvis and Vickers.

I hope that those five points will be useful to the Government in their next term.

8.19 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): This has been an extremely interesting debate. A number of hon. Members started with the point that I intend to make now. It is a matter that is particularly poignant, as I visited Lisburn barracks a couple of weeks ago only to find that a terrible tragedy occurred there just a few days later. It really does bring it firmly home to one, and my heart goes out to Warrant Officer Bradwell's family. It is an appalling tragedy and most regrettable.

I have had contact with people who have been affected by the bombs placed in the north-west of England, in Manchester and Warrington. When it gets that close to home, it makes one think very seriously about the issues involved. The Cheshire Regiment—my county regiment—is currently based in Ballykelly, and I often have discussions with the parents of young men who are part of that regiment and engaged in very important duties on behalf of the nation.

A number of points have been raised, but because of the time I shall have to leave them. I shall, however, praise Ministers on one point and personally thank all the

MOD people who were involved this year in the management of the armed forces parliamentary scheme. I have found the time that I have spent on the scheme extremely enlightening and would encourage hon. Members who have not had the opportunity of participating to do so. Because of age profiles, few of us will have had the opportunity to serve in the forces. Having been brought up in a military environment, and in later years living in Portsmouth, I thought it about time that I got on the other side of the dockyard fence to find out what was happening in the Navy.

I have been able to identify a number of matters about which the Government should think carefully. My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) touched briefly on the unsung work undertaken by the Navy in the anti-drugs war—a real war of enormous proportions. I have seen the scale of the success recently achieved by the West Indies guard ship and the work that is going on in conjunction with Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, but it is an area of the Navy's activities that is hardly mentioned outside. If people are looking for ideas about how to promote a positive role for that force today, that is one war in which every family in the land would welcome our participation. I urge that consideration be given to that.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for mentioning the role of the West Indies guard ship, and I applaud him for raising the matter of drugs, but is he not aware that we already mention it? Every time the West Indies guard ship scores a coup, which is all too regularly, we make it very public and it gets good coverage, but anything that he or any other hon. Member on either side of the House can do to help to get the message across about the vital role that it plays would be hugely welcome.

Mr. Miller: There have to be a few things on which we agree across the Floor of the House, despite some of the rhetoric of the debate. The drugs war is an important war and one in which we must firmly engage.

One area that concerns me—I pressed this point a couple of times yesterday and found a less than satisfactory response—is the batch 2 Trafalgar class submarines. Given that we are now in an era when countries such as Iran are holding control over SSKs, we really must be much more positive about that part of our flotilla. Frankly, if I had been asked a couple of years ago about the future development of our submarine fleet, I would not, perhaps, have taken the same view as I do now, but when one considers the world ownership of submarines, one sees that that issue needs to be addressed firmly, especially given the comments made by military leaders of some countries who believe that the world is growing as far as their territorial ambitions are concerned, now that they have submarines in their fleet.

One thing that was apparent during every visit I made was morale. Much has been said about morale, and there are areas where improvements are undoubtedly occurring, but in the Navy there is undoubtedly one constant theme coming through the force—that of gapping. When vessels are back in their home port, facilities must be made to enable people not just to take shore leave but to take leave back at their homes with their families. This calls into question the legitimacy of the continued process of civilianisation. I can see that there are arguments in some areas, but the MOD needs to think very carefully about the implications of continued civilianisation for morale. There needs to be a more positive approach to that.

There are logistical problems. There are serious morale problems. There are, for example, attempts to make a number of the bases a little more like home. I was somewhat concerned to discover, not a million miles from your own constituency, Madam Deputy Speaker, a McDonald's being built in Devonport. I hope that the MOD will insist at the very least that it serves British beef. Attempts are being made to improve morale, but they do not address the key issue of getting people back to their homes. I hope that the Minister will take that on board.

I shall make one blunt criticism about the Secretary of State's speech yesterday. He spent several paragraphs—I have just re-read it in *Hansard*—attacking the Labour party conference. I thought about that in the context of the very clear and concise speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), and the brilliant speech at the Labour party conference by a young mother from Chester who argued the case about the defence of this country in clear and concise terms. If one compares that with the activities of the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) on defence, where has he been on British Aerospace, Saighton Camp, Sealand, the Army pay office—on all the issues raised by my hon. Friend? That young mother has more knowledge in her little finger about the defence of this country than the hon. Member who represents City of Chester. I really hope that the Government will look more carefully at what is said at the Labour party conference before making such comments.

Last year, I was privileged to be part of a delegation, with my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), the shadow Secretary of State for Defence, meeting some folk in NATO. One of the great privileges of that was to be part of the early discussions with NATO about the eradication of mines. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the sterling work that he has put in. Commitments have now been made so that part of NATO's research and development budget will be directed towards the disposal of mines. That is a great credit to the Labour party. I do not think that there is an hon. Member in the House who would deny the unpleasantness of that weapon and the reasons why, in a post-war situation, we have to get them cleared up, particularly in some countries where appalling films are coming out about them. That element of our amendment tonight is particularly important and I hope that the House will take it on board.

There is so much more to say, but in 10 minutes one cannot cover everything. However, I hope that the Minister will take on board some of the observations that I have made, particularly with regard to the armed forces scheme, because they are worth considering.

8.29 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) made a thoughtful speech, based on his recent experience of the armed forces, which I followed with keen interest.

Those of us who maintain contact with the armed forces through our constituencies, or perhaps through the Defence Committee or the North Atlantic Assembly, have

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

many people to thank for the time that they commit to briefing us and telling us of their activities. We congratulate them on their efforts. We are well served by capable and determined men and women demonstrating old fashioned qualities of discipline and reliability, every one of them skilled and well trained. They are people of enormous drive with positive attitudes. We expect a great deal of them, but we must be vigilant not to take them for granted, to take advantage of them or to impose on them unacceptable terms and conditions.

The word "overstretch" keeps coming up in defence debates. It is the jargon word for repetitive postings, disruption of family life, insufficient periods between postings to Northern Ireland, increased duty on watch when a ship is in port, or working long hours to keep aircraft in service.

Men and women join the armed forces for a job that is different and challenging. Commanders want it to be just that, and our task as parliamentarians is to back them and give them the resources to make it so.

We are coming out of a period of poor recruitment, which we knew was coming. Many hon. Members will know the acronym MARILYN, standing, scarcely credibly, for manning and recruitment in the lean years of the 90s. We knew that there would be a recruiting problem in the 90s. We must now do all that we can to ensure that recruits come into the armed forces and stay in. We must provide a first-class and stimulating career for young men and women, and a decade or so after they have joined we must provide an attractive continuing career for trained and experienced men and women.

Young men and women may accept anti-social postings, but men and women in their 30s and 40s, when they are trained and particularly valuable and skilful, probably with families, will leave if they find the imposition on them and their families too great. We must therefore provide sport and adventurous training, watch out for the symptoms of overstretch and provide resources to back the commanders.

I am delighted that the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) has just re-entered the Chamber. I listened to his speech with great interest. He is the acceptable face of Labour on the subject of defence and a companionable and popular Member. I listened to him carefully, and he made the ragbag of an amendment tabled by the official Opposition sound as if it refers to a review of overstretch. Of course, it does nothing of the sort. The hon. Gentleman criticised overstretch and then said that there must be, or should be, a review of overstretch.

The amendment says that there must be

"a long-term strategic overview which can only be achieved through the establishment of a strategic defence review",

but we all know that such a review would be a review downwards, not upwards. I put it to the hon. Gentleman that he and his hon. Friends know that, if there were a defence review, it would result in a defence reduction rather than an increase. I defy him to deny that.

Dr. Reid: For the hon. Gentleman's elucidation, there are three general elements in any such review. The first concerns commitments to resources, and I encompassed overstretch within that; the second is the interweaving of foreign affairs and defence; the third is the interweaving of trade and industry and defence. Those three elements would form the core of any defence review. With regard to expenditure, we made two things absolutely plain. First, we will spend what is necessary for the defence of our country and, secondly, as the hon. Gentleman will see if he reads our statement, such a review will not—not—be a cover for cuts.

Mr. Viggers: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I know the Labour party's defence record over the years, and I know the defence record of our proud party over the years. I maintain, and I think that the country believes and knows, that it is the Conservative party which believes fervently in defence and will provide the resources, as it is doing, to maintain proper defences.

In the few remaining moments of my speech, I want to focus on just one area of defence which is dealt with in two thirds of page 91 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates"—medical care. Medical care is a crucial and central part of the teeth of defence, not part of the tail of defence. Primary care is in the front line of defence. One quarter of every army patrol is medically trained, and primary care is the responsibility of the single services, the Army, Navy and Air Force. It is a front-line operation, not a rear echelon one.

We must have quality, which we certainly have, but we should also have the quantity of defence capacity which will enable us to fulfil our responsibility in primary care and in secondary care. I see from the statistics section of the Statement that we have gone from 11 field ambulances and hospitals in 1975 to 12 among the regular forces in 1996, and from 15 to 18 in the Territorial Army in the same period of 21 years. That does not seem to equate to the facts as I understand them, which show that the numbers of hospitals, beds and medical staff in the armed forces have been reduced.

When I and my colleagues on the Defence Committee visit the royal hospital Haslar in my constituency next month, we will look carefully to ensure that we have the number of trained medical personnel available to fulfil the front-line function and the secondary function. We will want to know how many personnel will be available in the regular armed forces and how many will be available in times of emergency in the reserve forces, bearing in mind the reluctance of hospital trusts to encourage reserve commitment and my concern, which remains, that hospitals may be reluctant to appoint people to civilian appointments if they have a reserve commitment, thus weakening the reserve commitment to the medical section of the armed forces.

Mr. Soames: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Viggers: My hon. Friend knows that I have three minutes remaining, whereas he will have some time at the end of the debate.

The second area of medical care is secondary care. I am delighted that, with the choice of the royal hospital Haslar as the tri-service hospital, backed up by Ministry of Defence hospital units at Derriford, Frimley Park and Peterborough, the area of defence training will be at the royal medical defence college and that HMS Dolphin has been identified as a suitable site for that location. HMS Dolphin is opposite the royal naval hospital Haslar and having the secondary care unit there will make it easy to interchange the teaching and the practical roles within the armed forces.

I am satisfied with the current shape of the secondary care agency as it is evolving. It is right that we should take account of the fact that changing medical and surgical techniques are leading to shorter hospital stays, that the increased transportation of armed forces personnel means that patients might be brought back to the United Kingdom and NHS hospitals more quickly than in the past, and that the choice of the Gosport area allows a wider range of patients to be seen by armed forces doctors who usually treat fit and young male personnel, whereas in the Gosport-south Hampshire area they have a wide range of patients on whom to practise.

For some 80 years, HMS Dolphin has been the home of the submarine service, and it was a great disappointment when it was decided that the submarine service would leave HMS Dolphin. However, Fort Blockhouse, the home of HMS Dolphin, has served the armed forces and the country for nearly 500 years. I am confident that, as we move on, it will provide an ideal centre for military medical excellence.

8.39 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I should like to touch on two problems: NATO enlargement and the new challenges facing Britain in terms of military procurement.

On NATO enlargement, it is traditional that, after the end of a great war, the loser enters a period of instability and turbulence. That is the condition that Europe now finds itself in. The cold war ended, perhaps, in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin wall and the great events in central and eastern Europe. We must deal with a Russia that is unstable and giving contradictory signals and extend that area of stability which is the NATO alliance and seek, so far as we can, to influence positively potential regions of turbulence beyond NATO.

We are coming to the point at which the future security architecture of the new Europe is beginning to emerge through the fog. Those outlines were delineated in September in the Stuttgart speech of Secretary Christopher, followed by that of German Foreign Minister Kinkel. Their aim is to try to keep as much movement as possible to preserve flexibility, yet to be sensitive to Russia's problems.

On that architecture, it is now clear that the terms of the first wave of NATO's enlargement will be known in the Brussels summit in December, followed by the meeting in late spring next year. Presumably on or near the 50th anniversary of NATO, in April 1999, that first wave will take effect. We know that the Visegrad countries, with the exception, alas, of Slovakia—because, under Meciar, it has slipped badly from the democratic way—will be among that first wave. We are less certain about whether Slovenia will be there and even less certain about Romania, but the shape of that first group is emerging.

Russia will then have to have its proper interests dealt with. That will mean that its concerns about the boundaries of the new NATO and of the conditions of enlargement will need to be considered sensitively without giving it a veto. That means, it appears, a new charter between NATO and Russia, in which Russia will be given a special status. That raises problems.

There are at the same time a series of regional alliances—not only Visegrad, but the Baltic sea and the Barents sea alliances and a series of positive bilateral treaties that defy what has happened in history. Only last month, we had the Timisoara treaty between Romania and Hungary. Having served in the embassy in Hungary for some time, I understand the historic resonances of the problem over Transylvania. Russia is seeking to build up the Organisation for Co-operation and Security in Europe because of its status in it. There is likely to be a new directorate of the OSCE, which will be determined at the Lisbon summit in December, so the broad lines of that security architecture are looming through the mist.

The problem is those countries that, for a number of reasons, are not privileged to be in the first wave, or perhaps in any wave, of NATO enlargement. In history, they are the countries in the middle. One interesting perspective on European history is that either Russia or Germany is dominant and it is middle Europe where the problems arise, so the question on enlargement that I pose to the Government is: how will we seek to reassure and look after the interests of countries that will not be in the first wave? I think especially of the Baltics. A sensitive response is needed.

How much thought is being given, for example, to twinning NATO countries with the Baltics and others—the Bulgarians and Romanians? What effort will the Ministry of Defence make to go into those countries to assist in training? What will be the shape of a super-partnership for peace or other arrangements that will be reached? In terms of the Baltic countries, will we seek a new regional security structure and try to subcontract much of the work there to the Scandinavians, who have a geographic and historic relationship with the Baltics? We cannot leave that unclear. There must be movement to those countries that would otherwise feel isolated and neglected.

On the new challenges on procurement, my starting point is that the current problems were foreseeable, but were not foreseen by the Government. Historians will see that we have missed a series of opportunities in the real procurement challenges. Way back in 1994, Ernst and Young produced an excellent report that concluded that, increasingly, there were two axes in the west in military production: the United States and Europe. We have to make a choice. We must avoid fortress Europe, but unless and until European nations begin to pool and merge their resources, we shall opt out of the race to be prime contractors for the major projects.

Market forces will not do it. Even since that Ernst and Young report, which was based on pooling data of industrial concerns for a year or two before, there have been even greater signs of challenge from the United States—not just the mega-mergers, the Lockheed Martins and so on, but evidence of increasing United States pressure on third countries such as those in the Gulf. We see it now in respect of the fighter aircraft in central Europe, and on Hungary, Slovenia and Austria. There is pressure to take United States products rather than Europe's.

We have a choice. Do we seek simply to keep our options open? Do we seek to forget the challenges? Or do we seek to build a European defence entity that is not anti-America, but recognises that, if we do not, we shall be swamped by the size of the United States industrial machine? There are signs that we have more obstacles than most countries.

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

We accepted the value-for-money concepts of Sir Peter Levene, but they could be defined so narrowly in buying off the shelf—the C130-Js—that we would effectively avoid wider industrial and European perspectives. There have been some unfortunate remarks from Sir Peter Levene's successor about there being no polarisation between the United States and Europe. They appeared in the *Financial Times* survey on procurement in August. I hope that he was misquoted.

I must mention the signal that the Secretary of State for Defence gave in his speech last year, and the Government's posturing on Europe which gives a clear signal to our European partners that we are not serious about Europe. That is part of the internal squabble in the governing party which, alas, has unfortunate repercussions for Britain.

There are, however, some positive signs—not only the comparison between this year's "Statement on the Defence Estimates" and last year's and the Government's response to the excellent first joint report of the two Select Committees, but various things that have been said. Even the Secretary of State, with his known anti-European prejudices, is being dragged kicking and screaming to support Britain's interests.

I shall end just with these questions in relation to procurement. I accept that there were wrong signals, for example, on Apache and on the C130-J, but the batch of decisions on procurement in July were positive. The response—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Bruce George.

8.49 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I suppose I should be grateful that the Conservative party has run out of speakers, or some of my colleagues and I would not have been called. If we wait long enough, the time will come when Conservative Members keep out of the way. After giving a rhetorical flourish of criticism of the Labour party, hon. Members who have come to support their own Government have settled down to spend their time politely criticising them. Our debate on the defence estimates—the last before the general election—will give us, and more importantly the public, a chance to evaluate the truth of the Government's portrayal of themselves as a brilliant Government who are pro-defence and their portrayal of Labour as a party that comprises a bunch of pacifists who are unfit for office.

Towards the end of his speech, the Minister of State for Defence Procurement listed a number of procurement items that are to be ordered. In doing so he seemed to display the philosophy that the threat of a public hanging concentrates the mind. The imminent election has made the Government seek to give the impression that they have been funding defence projects almost ad infinitum, but we know that that is not so.

Any Opposition who neglect defence suffer the consequences: the Labour party deservedly suffered the consequences in 1983 and, to a lesser extent, in 1987. But Governments who neglect defence do so, not just at their own peril, but, more importantly, to the detriment of national security. I fear that the depth and nature of the defence cuts over the past 10 or 15 years have been to the detriment of national security.

I wonder whether the Government will attack the Labour party as they have done in previous elections. The Conservative party may be called the stupid party, but it is not that stupid. Its members must realise that they are on dangerous ground in thinking that the Labour party is the same Labour party as they faced in those halcyon days when the Tory party was identified with defence. If the Conservative party tries to make the defence issue one of confidence, it will suffer the consequences—I hope that it takes that course. I do not think that it will have the opportunity, as it had in 1987, of commissioning posters of soldiers holding their hands in the air in surrender. A consensus is emerging that the Labour party has become much better, while the Government have become much worse.

On the available evidence, with defence expenditure at an historic low and falling, it would be as sane for the Conservative party to proclaim itself the party of defence as it would be for it to proclaim itself the party of law and order when crime levels are at an historic high and rising. Labour is not the party of the 1980s. That period was an abberation for us in the same way—although it was less damning to the country—as the little holiday from realism undertaken by the Conservative party in the 1930s, which had disastrous consequences for this country and mankind. If the Conservative party wants to delve into history, I shall be delighted to join in an historical debate on defence.

The Labour party with which the Conservatives are now dealing is in the tradition not of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), but of the party that joined the coalition in the first world war and recognised the rise of Hitler long before the Government of Baldwin and Chamberlain. The Opposition brought down the Government who had brought us to the verge of military catastrophe while the majority of Government Members sat on their hands or supported the Government. It is the party of Wilson and Callaghan, who sustained the nuclear deterrent and maintained defence expenditure at a higher level than Tory Governments who followed them.

The Labour party has little to be anxious about. We have learnt the lessons of the 1980s. If the subject is to be raised in the election, the Labour party should do more than hope that it does not become an issue; it should go on the attack. The Tories will say that defence expenditure has slipped a little. Let us remind the public that, when Labour left office in 1979, the budget for that year was 4.9 per cent.—the average was 4.55 per cent. for that period of office. The budget has now declined to 3 per cent. and will probably fall to 2.6 per cent.

Therefore, the chasm that existed between this country's defence expenditure under the last Labour Government and the Thatcher Government and the defence expenditure of our European partners has, under this Government, narrowed to a fraction. Opposition Members who want to see defence expenditure fall to the level of our European and NATO partners should perhaps support the Government in the Lobby this evening, because the Tory Government have narrowed the gap far more than a Labour party conference would wish to have done.

The Select Committee on Defence stated that the defence budget had been trimmed consistently since the inception of "Options for Change". The Select Committee has frequently stated that it is unhappy with the process of cut upon cut. It said that there had been no period of

financial calm—just the opposite. No plan seems to survive the next public expenditure round. Every activity is reviewed and revised again.

The priority in the public expenditure survey 1994 must surely be, as never before, to leave defence expenditure well alone. That did not happen, to such an extent that our Committee has given a warning that, unless the Government can come up with something serious and state that there will be no further cuts of any kind, it cannot recommend the defence estimates to the House. The absence of Conservative Members on the Committee suggests that they are going to sit on their hands or endorse the Government's defence policy despite the commitment given.

I was recently in Portsmouth, which houses the little that is left of our Navy. I seem to see more boats marked Brittany Ferries than representing the Royal Navy—so many ships were available for sale. I spoke to people in the merchant marine—there is not much of that left. The Government's record on the Navy is appalling.

The Defence Committee has been told that things will be all right on the night and that perhaps it was overstating the case on overstretch. But we were right and the Government were wrong. We have received pompous lectures on Gulf war syndrome. I suspect that, the next time we meet, any Government representative will show slightly more humility.

As for procurement, we are all aware of a number of items that have arrived late, have not arrived at all or have arrived greatly over cost. Phoenix, endorsed by the Government, represents the Government: its life span is about the same. The Government first began to think about something such as Phoenix in 1980; we shall get it in about the year 2000. Phoenix and the Government are both much maligned, and deservedly so. They both crash frequently—the difference is that the Government rescued Phoenix, but the electorate will not rescue the Government.

The idea of the Government wrapping themselves in the flag and then giving over Ministry of Defence housing to a Japanese consortium is bizarre. There are some charitable aspects, and I suppose we must forgive and forget. The consortium representing the successful bidders contains one Scottish member, so we may have a Robert the Bruce close or a William Wallace street. We must forgive the Americans, so perhaps we shall have a street named after John Paul Jones, who successfully defeated the British Navy. But I resent the idea of an Admiral Togo or an Admiral Yamamoto avenue. If we are to give over things to those countries that fought us in the war, perhaps we should have a consortium of Zulus, Sikhs and Sudanese to complete the farce.

This evening I should have been at the annual conference of the Defence Police Federation. I am afraid that the Government's vendetta against it and the Ministry of Defence police continues.

On a more positive note, rather than let the GKN Warrior production line fade away, I ask the Government to hear the pleas that have been made by Members on both sides of the House and seriously consider the offer made on the GKN Warrior mortar proposal. If the Government want the production line to continue, they must take positive action.

In its conclusions, the Defence Committee said:

"We cannot recommend the 1996 Statement on the Defence Estimates to the House unless Ministers make clear in the debate that this year's statement will not again be undermined by further defence cuts in the 1996 Budget or by any other means."

That assurance has not been given. If Conservative Members are not prepared to give the Government the kick up the backside that they deserve, I hope that, at least privately, they have the courage to say that enough is enough, the cuts have gone too far and it is about time that we started building up our defences and not destroying them.

8.59 pm

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): I fully endorse the tributes that have been paid by hon. Members on both sides of the House to the professionalism and dedication of the British armed forces. Service in the armed forces is public service of the highest order and we are lucky to have so many talented and patriotic men and women who are prepared to serve the United Kingdom in such a way. I especially praise the efforts of British service personnel in Bosnia who have made such a major contribution to the NATO-led peace implementation force.

I am sad that the Secretary of State for Defence chose to begin his speech yesterday by saying that Labour Members do not care about the defence of this country. That is not true. Patriotism is not the preserve of only one party in this House, and Labour Members are just as concerned as anyone else to ensure that this country is properly defended. We have always made it clear that, under a Labour Government, that will continue to be so. It appears that the Secretary of State has not learnt the necessary lessons after his abysmal speech at last year's Conservative party conference.

It is worth looking behind Ministers' bogus rhetoric to study their record in recent years of managing the defence budget. The Government have presided over massive reductions in spending that have often appeared random and unintelligible and have drawn criticism from the Select Committee on Defence, former service chiefs and the defence industry itself, which often has to pick up the pieces resulting from the delays and confusion that have come to characterise the Government's procurement policies about which I shall say a little more later.

I am relieved that Ministers are now urgently looking into the exposure of British forces personnel to organophosphate chemicals during the Gulf war. I remind the Minister about one of my constituents, Corporal Mervyn Gray, about whom I wrote to him on 10 June. Corporal Gray was clearly exposed to massive amounts of organophosphates during the Gulf war but, despite the Government's announcement of an emergency review of such cases, he has not yet had any new or fresh contact with the Ministry of Defence. I hope that the Minister has not forgotten him and will look into his case at the earliest possible opportunity.

Mr. Soames: Has Corporal Gray been to the medical assessment panel?

Mr. Hutton: Yes, he has.

I shall confine the rest of my remarks to naval defence procurement and Government policy towards the defence industry as a whole. The defence industry is unique in

[Mr. Hutton]

many ways. The Government are its only UK customer and have the power to determine in which international markets the industry can operate. That relationship means that the Government have a special responsibility towards defence companies which does not exist anywhere else in British industry. Sadly, that responsibility has not always been properly discharged. That has been especially true in relation to the rundown of defence spending in recent years.

Key procurement contracts are often the subject of chronic delays, with deadlines constantly being allowed to slip further and further behind schedule. That almost always results in further job losses in defence companies, as has sadly been so in my constituency at VSEL. A classic example of such delay was in relation to the batch 2 Trafalgar class submarine contract. Work was due to start in 1994. The contract has not yet been let. When will it be let? A gap of at least three years has opened up. It is worth reminding ourselves that the last contract for an SSN was placed in 1986. That 11-year gap is unprecedented in the Royal Navy's history.

The White Paper makes extensive reference to the Royal Navy's nuclear submarine capability and the Government's desire to maintain it. It is hard to see such a desire reflected in the Government's handling of such a vital contract. What will be the operational consequences for the Royal Navy of that delay? There have also been extensive delays in finally placing the contract for the landing platform dock replacements. I am delighted that that contract has been placed and that VSEL in my constituency won it, but it, too, has been characterised by serious delay.

The contract for two new auxiliary oilers will also be very important to my constituency. I hope that the Minister will give an assurance that that contract will not be subject to similar delays, and that orders will be placed on schedule by the end of the year.

I share the hope of my hon. Friends the Members for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) and for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) that we should all be aiming to develop a new national consensus on Britain's defence policy for the new millennium. Like them, I suspect that Tory Ministers are not up to that task.

9.3 pm

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): I shall keep my remarks extremely brief, because another hon. Member wishes to speak. I am sure that it will not go unnoticed outside the House that there have been more Labour Members than Conservative Members wishing to speak in this debate.

I want to make two simple points. I ask the Minister to deal in summing up with the important matter of service men who suffered from exposure to asbestos from the 1940s through to the 1960s. I repeat the requests that I put to him last year. First, he should find out how many such men are suffering—he can get that information from the War Pensions Agency. Secondly, what would be the cost of compensating those men at the same rate as dockyard workers are compensated? Thirdly, will he seriously consider some ex gratia payment for those men? If we ignore the dwindling number of men who are now dying, we shall continue a considerable injustice to men who are suffering seriously in the autumn of their lives.

Following the massive job losses in the dockyards, certain questions remain in respect of the privatisation of Devonport dockyard. We are, quite properly, asking those questions. First, should a dockyard that is so central to our strategic defence interests be in private hands? Secondly, could a privatised dockyard fall into undesirable or even hostile hands? Thirdly, can a dockyard working as a private company, with all the constraints that that entails, respond to sudden demands such as the Falklands or the Gulf war? I recall the response given to me two years ago by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who was then the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence. He said then that that was impossible.

The answer to my first question is largely dependent on the answer to the other two. Yesterday, the Minister asked my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) what is stability. I can tell him now what stability means to something such as our dockyard. It is a period of knowing where it is going; it is a period of knowing that there is a world of certainty; and it is when workers feel valued because there is a period in which they know they will have a job. Most of all, if the sale of Devonport dockyard goes through, it is a period in which the management and the workers of the company together can plan for the future not only of the dockyard, but of jobs in Plymouth.

I ask the Minister to address those important and essential matters. In particular, will he let us know when the negotiations for the D154 will be complete, so that the sale can be completed and we can move into a world of genuine stability?

I was delighted to hear the speeches made yesterday by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields and other Members on the Labour Front Bench. They were excellent speeches and confirm that Labour is now the party of defence—the party that will ensure that our future defence is secure.

9.7 pm

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): I shall be brief and focus on a single issue: the future of the incomparable buildings in Greenwich which currently house the Royal Naval College.

In previous debates on defence estimates and the armed forces, we have highlighted the way in which the Government took an unwise decision to close the Greenwich complex and move the tri-service college elsewhere on the basis of dubious estimates and suspect figures that suggested that the costs of relocating to Camberley would be less than those of retaining a college in Greenwich. It has now become clear that those estimates and the assumptions behind them were false.

The Government's proposal for the relocation of the tri-service college is now unravelling. Staff and those attending the college now face the prospect of moving into temporary accommodation at Bracknell with a huge question mark hanging over their future at Camberley or possibly at another site. That cannot be the right way to handle the training of our senior staff in all services. The question must now be addressed whether we should have a further look at whether Greenwich might provide the appropriate location for all or part of the tri-service college.

The Greenwich complex is an incomparable set of buildings. Any other country that possessed such rich architecture with such important historic associations

would leap at the prospect of using them as a focus for service training. Few other countries would treat such a priceless piece of heritage with the curiously cavalier attitude displayed by the Government.

This evening, hon. Members on both sides have asked whether Greenwich could not or should not perform the function that it has performed exceptionally well for the past 120 years—that of a service college providing high-quality training for senior staff in the armed forces in an incomparable setting.

The issue must be reopened, and there is good logic behind re-examining whether Greenwich is not the appropriate site for the location of the tri-service college. I hope that if the Government do not have the decency to accept the fact that they have disgracefully mishandled this issue in the past, the incoming Government, next May, will re-examine the issue to determine whether we can establish a sensible, proper basis for service training in the wonderful buildings at Greenwich.

9.9 pm

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): First, I should like to say how impressed I and other Opposition Members have been during the past two days with the robust and informed debate on the state of our defences. I am thinking, for example, of the speech—made from a constituency point of view—by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), and to the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who dealt with a number of issues. What most interested me and other Opposition Members, however, were the references to consensus during the past two days, and the somewhat dramatic reaction of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to the question whether there should be a consensus on defence matters.

There is a case for consensus on the major principles of how we defend our nation, but that does not affect how the Opposition must criticise the Government in their management of our defence. The Minister will recall that he and I led in Committee for our parties on the Reserve Forces Act 1996. Throughout that period, there was no question but that there was general agreement on the major principles that lay behind the Act.

That is a good example of consensus, as are the comments that have been made during the past two days about our armed forces, which undertake a huge variety of tasks at home and abroad. Opposition Members pay tribute to the men and women in our three armed forces, wherever they serve—in Britain and Northern Ireland or abroad.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) and the hon. Members for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) and for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) spoke of the new challenges now facing our defence forces. There are challenges in Northern Ireland, which has experienced the most tragic consequences in the past few weeks. There are challenges of the new weapons of mass destruction—which are still held worldwide, sometimes in the hands of unstable dictatorships.

We face the challenge of ethnic nationalism and political and religious extremism, such as we have witnessed in Afghanistan in the past month. There is the challenge of increasing crime and drug trafficking, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port. There are challenges in a world in which, of 82 major conflicts between 1989 and 1992, all but three were civil wars.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) spoke about the enlargement of NATO. I was in Poland last week, and that country, among others, is very anxious to join NATO. We must, however, balance that with parallel agreements with Russia, which of course is still a major player in defence.

All these matters reflect the Labour party's view on what our policy should be on defence. My hon. Friends the Members for Walsall, South (Mr. George), for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) and for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) mentioned those important matters. The Labour party believes that we should play our role as members of the Security Council of the United Nations and of NATO in safeguarding the lives of many thousands of people across the world.

Two weeks ago, the Labour party conference once again emphasised Labour's commitment to the strong defence of our nation. The same conference committed Labour to working towards a nuclear-free world, but by a process of multilateral disarmament. We also realised that we need to keep our nuclear deterrent until multilateral agreements abolish the need for nations to keep weapons of mass destruction.

Although my hon. Friends the Members for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) and for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) hold their views with deep sincerity, those views do not represent the policy of the British Labour party. That policy was encapsulated in Blackpool two weeks ago in a conference resolution which clearly said that we are committed to keeping Trident until multilateral negotiations get rid of nuclear weapons from our planet.

The Secretary of State told his party conference—he repeated this yesterday—that Labour left wingers demanded the abolition of the nuclear deterrent and a drastic reduction in defence spending. He went on:

"The Labour leadership typically responds by pandering to them."

I do not know whom he means by "the Labour leadership" in that respect. It is not the leader of the Labour party, it is not the shadow Secretary of State for Defence, it is not the shadow Cabinet, it is not the majority of members of the parliamentary party, and it certainly is not the Labour party conference. It is important to put on record the fact that the Labour party is as committed to the defence of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as the Conservatives are, if not more so.

All the great changes referred to by me and others show the need for the proper strategic defence review referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) yesterday and by my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North this afternoon. On being elected to office next year, we shall undertake such a review, which we hope will take no more than six months.

Why should our country be any different from any other country in the western world since the end of the cold war? We need a defence review to ensure that we match our foreign affairs needs, our trade and industry needs and our defence needs. In a recent Lords debate on the defence estimates, Field Marshal Lord Bramall said that, were Labour's defence review to happen—I assure the House that it will—it would have to consider foreign policy and trade policy in conjunction with defence policy.

[Mr. Paul Murphy]

I also want to make it abundantly clear that the review will provide the resources necessary for the proper defence of this country. No matter what the hon. Members for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) and for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) have said, it will not be a device for making defence cuts, because it will be led by defence needs, not by the Treasury.

Why do we say that? Because the Government have done precisely the opposite during the past five years. Their problem is the way in which they have handled the inevitable changes. The cuts have been dictated not by the Ministry of Defence, but by the Treasury. Change has been incompetently managed, there has been no strategic rationale, and the Government have even managed to lose their picture collections. The years of change have been dominated by waste and inefficiency, by cost overruns and by a damaging gap between resources and commitments.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), who is not here, made a good speech, in part. The bits which did not come from a Conservative central office briefing were sensible. Like other hon. Members on both sides, she referred to the overstretch of our armed forces.

In yesterday's debate, interestingly, the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) quoted what appeared to be a Conservative party document, which said:

"Only the Conservatives can offer a period of stability both in terms of size and funding of the Armed Forces."

That, I suppose, is why, over the past six years, the Army has been reduced by 27 per cent., the RAF by 42 per cent. and the Royal Navy by 30 per cent., so that, at the beginning of the new millennium, our total armed forces will consist of about 210,000 men and women. The Army is now 4,000 under strength, and only seven of the 54 regiments and corps are up to strength.

The Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, who is here now, made a good speech yesterday. The Select Committee report says that soldiers are borrowed from other units, leaving them

"depleted and less able to carry out their full training schedule."

On the RAF, the report says:

"We conclude that at the present time the RAF is just about meeting its commitments while going through a period of considerable change."

Today, the United States marine corps has more men than the British Army, more aircraft carriers than the Royal Navy and more aircraft than the RAF. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South referred to a number of interesting matters regarding the Navy. We are told by the Government that there are 35 frigates and destroyers, but that only 27 of them are operational. That figure compares with 69 in 1985.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South also mentioned the Merchant Navy. Some 92 per cent. of trade to this country comes by sea. While our merchant fleet has gone into sharp decline, the ships that move our troops and equipment to Bosnia and elsewhere have come from Germany, Poland, Malta and Ukraine.

The Minister knows that a ship used in Operation Purple Star—an operation that he applauded, as we all did, some months ago—from Ukraine was impounded by American customs because it was unsafe. I have nothing against Ukrainians, but we must talk about their ships. Very often the Government are obsessed with price and do not consider reliability and quality. That is a theme to which I shall return.

Is it any wonder that the morale of our forces has been affected? In Bosnia—where we all applaud the work of our men and women—our troops have had their overseas allowances cut, while all other nations have offered bonuses and special compensation. For example, a British private soldier based in Germany who goes to former Yugoslavia loses £1,239 a year, while a German soldier gains £21,470 a year, tax-free.

There is a need for high motivation among members of our armed forces. They are men and women who have to put their lives on the line, and are not just civilians in uniform. When talking about the defence industry yesterday, the Secretary of State said that no employer offers jobs for life. But no other job involves sacrificing one's life for one's country. My fear is that the perception referred to by the Under-Secretary in another place—that the armed forces is an "industry in decline" with redundancies and uncertainty—has affected recruitment.

The hon. Member for Gosport referred to recruitment problems. In 1995-96, only 11,000 men and women were recruited to the Army, when 15,000 were required. The problem was that the Ministry of Defence pruned the intake of school leavers far too severely. There is no point in having a raft of sergeant-majors with no one to command, and that is what happened.

What on earth happened to the Bett report? The hon. Member for Canterbury and others have referred to the report, which was much trumpeted, cost a lot of money and made 150 recommendations. The Government accepted one that referred to four or five senior ranks. However, the Secretary of State—who had told the House that he and his Ministers would properly consider the report before the recess—said in a written answer on 24 July that more work was required on the detailed options, and added:

"It is likely that those will be set out in a report later this year which would provide the basis for an information exercise within the forces".—[*Official Report*, 24 July 1996; Vol. 282, c. *426*.]

Well, that is the end of that. The Bett report has been shelved—or, in the words of the hon. Member for Canterbury, "buried". There is not much difference, but what a waste of time and money over all these years.

I and my party believe that the Government have gone over the top in chapter six of the defence estimates document, which looks like a business manual. It talks about business plans, glossy charters and the bottom line—all that stuff. There is nothing wrong with being businesslike, and everyone agrees that there is always room for more efficiency and cost-effectiveness. But our armed forces are not private companies. They are not businesses. The Falklands war was not a business venture. Saddam Hussein was not a business competitor—he was an evil and determined enemy. That is what our forces are about—fighting wars and defending this country.

The contractorisation that goes with all this is most obvious in the Royal Air Force. We have witnessed the disaster of RAF St. Athan. We do not know how much money was wasted there—tens, or perhaps hundreds, of thousands of pounds. The Government are not prepared to tell us what went wrong. This afternoon, the Minister

of State for Defence Procurement said that he was in favour of "competitive rigour". I wish that he would be more rigorous about finding out about what happened at RAF St. Athan, and would tell the House how much it has cost the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), as always, raised the subject of the future of RAF Sealand in north Wales, where 1,300 aircraft technicians and 300 service personnel find their jobs are at risk because of the Government's doctrinaire insistence on market testing, even though RAF Sealand has consistently proved to be highly efficient.

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) referred to the royal dockyards. I was in Devonport recently, and in Rosyth some months ago. Without question, the people who work in those dockyards want a period of stability, but have not been granted one. There has been delay after delay, postponed announcement after postponed announcement. I hope that tonight the Minister of State will be able to put our minds at rest in that respect.

This debate is essentially about the defence estimates, but it is not long until the Budget. We are told that the Treasury may intend to cut £400 million from the defence budget. That would certainly be in line with the indiscriminate cuts of recent years—and with the recent scandal of the sale of the married quarters.

The hon. Member for Canterbury said that service families were rightly worried about increases in their rents, and about their security of tenure. In Colchester alone, there is a 50 per cent. turnover in the married quarters; roughly 10 families a day move. We understand that the Ministry is giving no guarantees to service families about where they will live after the developers take over.

During the Lords debate on these estimates, one peer said:

"A deal which nets the Treasury some £1.5 billion and returns to the military only £100 million to £200 million is not necessarily very attractive. Apart from that, I believe that the decision may be fundamentally flawed in purely commercial, not military, terms."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 July 1996; Vol.574, c.569.]

That was said by a peer who voted for the Government.

The truth, of course, came in the answer to the debate by the Under-Secretary, when he said:

"It would be idle to pretend that such a sum as we expect to raise would not be significant to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor as he shapes his Budget plans."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 July 1996; Vol.574, c.594.]

There we have it. The whole episode of the sale of the married quarters was not about improving the lot of our armed forces or their dependants; it was about getting more money for the Budget before a general election.

The Government deny that defence decisions are Treasury led. In last year's statement on the defence estimates they talked about spending stability, yet between 1995 and 1998 nearly £700 million will be cut from the defence budget. In 1995-96, there has been, we are told, a £200 million underspend, which the Government described to the Select Committee as deferred payment for equipment and supplies. We know what that means: the Labour Government will have to pay next year. That, among other reasons, is why the Select Committee refused to recommend these estimates to the House of Commons. We entirely go along with the Select Committee in that.

Why on earth should we perpetuate the myth that the Conservatives are to be trusted with our nation's defences? They have reduced our forces to an all-time low. They have failed to match resources to commitments. They have wasted millions of pounds by their incompetence and bungling. They have betrayed service families in the married quarters affair, and yesterday they admitted that the House had been misled over the scandal of Gulf war syndrome.

Our armed forces have nothing to thank this Government for. The sooner the Government go, the better it will be—not just for the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, but for the whole country.

9.29 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): It is my great privilege to close this important annual debate on the defence White Paper. Over the past two days, we have heard some perceptive and thoughtful contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the House, and I shall attempt to cover some of the points raised.

Luckily, I do not have to pass judgment on the speech by the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) last night, whose performance, as always, was so reminiscent, to those of us who love small, cuddly animals, of Basil Brush on amphetamines. The hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) made, as he always does, a good and interesting speech, although most Conservative Members will have found it impossible to agree with almost any part of it; nevertheless, he had plainly gone to much trouble to present his case. I shall, of course, write to those hon. Members who raised questions. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will deal by correspondence with those questions that involved defence procurement, and any points that I miss tonight will be dealt with later.

The use of organophosphate pesticides in the Gulf has been raised by a number of my hon. Friends and other hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), who served in the Gulf and made an effective and well-informed speech, and the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton).

It has become clear, as the House now knows, that organophosphate insecticides were used more widely in the Gulf than we had been led to believe. I regret that the information given to the Defence Select Committee and to other hon. Members in the past few years has proved to be incorrect. The answers, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State made clear last night, were given by Ministers in good faith, based on advice at the time. However, I fully accept that my Department should have known the correct position earlier, and I wish to stress to the House the great importance that I personally have always attached to the resolution of that complicated and difficult question and our determination to get to the bottom of it.

Our first concern is and must be the health and well-being of our service personnel who served in the Gulf. The use of OP pesticides may be a pointer to why some Gulf veterans are ill. We have already set about re-examining the medical records of all those who have attended the medical assessment process. The hon.

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

Member for Barrow and Furness mentioned the case of a specific soldier. I do not recall that case individually, but if the soldier has been through the medical assessment process and feels that he is still not being properly cared for, the hon. Gentleman must let me have the details at once.

I reiterate that we are determined to get to the bottom of the matter. We have commissioned a comprehensive investigation into the use of OP insecticides during the Gulf war and it will look urgently, and in the greatest detail, at the exact circumstances in which OP pesticides were used and the extent of their use. I shall report further to the House when that work is complete.

We continue to retain an open mind on the possibility of existence or otherwise of a specific Gulf war syndrome. It is clear that some veterans are ill, although I am encouraged by the story told by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby of his former comrade who was so ill and has been so well looked after. That is the experience of all those who have been through the service medical programme. We are anxious to find out whether the health of any of our Gulf war veterans has been affected by their service in the Gulf and the use of OP pesticides may be a factor that has affected a few veterans.

The House will be aware that we have, throughout our work on those health issues, been guided by the best medical advice available in the land. Hon. Members will recall that we asked the Royal College of Physicians to endorse the methodology of the medical assessment programme in July 1995. It approved our programme of work, but it recommended that we seek the advice of the Medical Research Council on a further detailed programme of research. The MRC has been given the latest information so that it can factor that in as it decides on a further programme of research into Gulf health issues. It has said that it will take the findings fully into account and that it remains on course to make its final recommendations to us on a programme of research to be announced next month.

The House will also wish to be reassured that we are in close touch with the United States authorities. Last week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to his opposite number in the United States—US forces made wide use of pesticides, including organophosphates, during the Gulf war—about their programme of research into Gulf health issues. I assure the House that we shall take full account of any research that they have done on OP pesticides.

Let me make it clear that the Government are fully and wholly committed, as we must be, to the health of our service men and women. We fully understand the concerns and anxieties of those who are ill and their families, and we are determined to get to the root of this difficult and extremely complex question. The information on the use of OP pesticides is a new factor and may be a pointer. But I give you my personal assurance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we shall find out whatever there is to discover.

Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State reported to the House on IFOR's achievements and the prospects for a lasting peace in the wake of the election. The standard of contributions to our debate, including those from hon. Members who visited Bosnia with the Defence Select Committee earlier this year, has demonstrated the concern that the House feels for the future of that troubled land and the pride that we all share in the contribution that has been made by the British forces. I whole-heartedly agree with the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness and many others, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), who has been an immensely assiduous Chairman of the Defence Select Committee. He has been to Bosnia on many occasions with his Committee and has returned each time with a high opinion of the work and efforts of our troops.

In July, I was delighted to have an opportunity to return to Bosnia to visit the UK units serving with IFOR. Like everyone else who has been there, I was truly impressed by the exceptional work that they have done. I was also impressed by the civilians involved in the outstandingly successful aid programme, which deserves great credit. I visited troops throughout the British-led multinational Division South-West, and it was clear that our people's firm, no-nonsense and thoroughly professional approach has gained the respect of all the parties and ensured their broad compliance with the terms of the peace agreement. From the busy divisional headquarters in Banja Luka to the small and sometimes extremely exposed detachments in isolated areas manned by young officers and very few men, all our people are making a remarkable contribution to the great success of IFOR's mission and all that it means for the future of NATO and events to come.

Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the importance of projects being undertaken in conjunction with the Overseas Development Agency. That work has been instrumental in sustaining and nurturing the peace, and has been a feature of the UK's contribution since the earliest days of UNPROFOR. Working with local people, British engineers and ODA staff are whole-heartedly helping them to rebuild their lives and communities. There has been wonderful co-operation between the Army and the ODA and much good has come of it. In that respect we have learnt many lessons for the future, which we shall apply to future operations. It is a pity that people outside do not realise the full extent of Britain's contribution to the aid programme and the remarkable way in which the ODA and the military have worked together.

I have time, alas, to dwell on but one small example among many. I visited a tiny hamlet called Jezero, in an area totally and utterly devastated during the conflict. A tiny health clinic there has been completely rebuilt by British engineers and the ODA. The clinic's one doctor and two nurses have been brought back and have been providing medical services to the 500 people who have now crept back into the area. That reconstruction effort, of which the clinic is but one tiny piece, encourages still more people to return to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives and broken homes. The House should be aware also of the commitment that Baroness Chalker has made to the work in Bosnia, for which she deserves great credit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), in an extremely interesting and thoughtful speech—about 85 per cent. of which I agreed with whole-heartedly, which is about 60 per cent. more than usual—and the hon. Member for Motherwell, North said that it was too early to say what international effort would be required after the end of the IFOR mandate in

December. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said yesterday, it would be premature to take decisions today about a possible follow-on force to IFOR. However, it is clear that, if a continuing military presence were required in 1997, we would expect it to be NATO-led and that the United Kingdom would play its part alongside its allies. The House will be aware that contingency planning has been set in hand by NATO's military authorities and that this country is playing a full role. That will allow us to make properly informed decisions when the time comes.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The Minister will recall that, in confirming that the United Kingdom would participate in such a follow-on force, his right hon. Friend added the rider that he thought that it was important for the United States to be part of such a force. Will the Minister confirm that the Government believe that the United States should contribute to that follow-on force in the form of forces on the ground rather than in any other way?

Mr. Soames: Yes, and every other member of NATO expects that to be the case.

Before I say anything about Northern Ireland—I lump together the comments of all hon. Members on that subject—I offer my deepest sympathy to Warrant Officer Bradwell's grieving family and to the other victims of the IRA's despicable attack on Thiepval barracks last week. Artificer Sergeant Major Bradwell was a first-class and highly skilled non-commissioned officer, in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. He was simply doing his duty and his murder serves as a grim and tragic reminder of the risks faced by our service personnel every day.

I have been lucky enough to visit Northern Ireland many times as Minister of State. It is indeed the front line of the British armed forces' fight against a vicious and brutal terrorism. I never fail to be truly impressed by our soldiers' calm determination and steadiness—qualities that they have displayed in Northern Ireland for more than 27 years with great, and often heroic, distinction. I know that the House has particular admiration for the remarkable men of the home service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment, whose unique commitment deserves the nation's unqualified respect.

Those men will not be daunted by last week's bombings; nor will anyone else serving in Northern Ireland, or anyone in Britain. It will stiffen their absolute resolve to combat terrorism in the Province until it ceases to be a blight on the lives of the people who live there and who want peace very much. The IRA is making yet another grotesque miscalculation if it believes that those wicked acts of violence will bend the will of a Conservative Government.

In our debate over the past two days, much has been said about the way in which our defence and security policies have a global outlook. However, we sometimes pay less attention to what that means in practice for our service men and women. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) enjoyed his time on the armed forces parliamentary scheme. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) and many other hon. Members on both sides of the House have enjoyed it and have seen at first hand what the massive range of deployments means for our armed forces. Rather than the crash and thunder that issue from the Dispatch Box in a set-piece debate such as this, we can learn about the ordinary, everyday lives of service men and women as they go throughout the world.

All around the world—not just in Bosnia and the middle east or the places that we hear about every day—Britain's armed forces are engaged in a range of operational and training deployments. I think it is important to highlight the extraordinary scope of our commitments and responsibilities and the remarkable way in which they are carried out. Tonight, 51 of the Queen's ships, together with six Royal Fleet Auxiliaries, are deployed to every corner of the globe, from the south Atlantic to Scandinavia, and from the Caribbean to Hong Kong.

HMS Edinburgh, a type 42 destroyer, with RFA Bayleaf in support, is in the Gulf on the Armilla patrol. After 17 years of providing reassurance to British shipping and playing a unique role in enhancing the security of our many friends in the Gulf, the Armilla patrol remains vital to the preservation of British interests in an area where we continue to maintain extremely important commercial, political and military relationships. No doubt all that would be reviewed in the Labour party's defence review, should it ever win a general election.

The type 42 destroyer HMS Exeter is in the south China sea, an area whose importance my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State highlighted yesterday. HMS Lancaster, a type 23 frigate, is patrolling the Falkland Islands. That is a potent symbol of our firm commitment to our dependencies in the south Atlantic. Her sister ship, HMS Argyll, is in the Caribbean, where among other things she plays a vital role in the international fight against drug trafficking in the region. The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston stressed the vital role of the West Indian guard ship in preventing drug smuggling and how much we wish that a wider public knew of the success of these missions.

HMS Nottingham, a type 42 destroyer, is assigned to NATO's Standing Naval Force Mediterranean, and HMS Invincible is also in the Mediterranean, having recently participated in a major regional NATO exercise designed to improve interoperability and co-operation on land, sea and in the air.

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary Resource is at Split, where she has played a crucial role in support of our forces in Bosnia. I had the chance to visit the headquarters of the RFA in July, and I pay a warm and handsome tribute to the officers and crews of the RFA. Without them, the Royal Navy could not function.

In June, I visited the Royal Marine Commando training centre at Lympstone. I wish that the entire House could see the Royal Marines' fantastically high standards, both physically and in terms of their exceptional military capability, and also their superb esprit de corps. Today, elements of the Marines are conducting field-firing training in Cyprus, boat and beach training in the Netherlands and other exercises in Brunei and the United States. A fleet diving unit is taking part in a NATO mine warfare exercise in Turkey, and 40 Commando is luckily taking leave after an excellent tour in Northern Ireland.

Like many other Members, I have had opportunities to visit our submariners at Faslane. I wish to pay my tribute to the dedicated men who serve in both our hunter killer

[Mr. Soames]

and Trident boats, and before them on the Polaris vessels which served us so well for 30 years. We place on them and their families the most strenuous demands and they respond with demonstrable spirit and fortitude.

As the House will be fully aware, the Army's operational commitments are not limited to Bosnia and Northern Ireland. In Hong Kong, the resident Gurkha battalion will remain until next month, when it will move to the United Kingdom. I assure the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that he need have no anxiety about the Gurkhas. They are a valued and important part of our defence capability.

The Army continues to provide infantry and Royal Engineer forces in the Falklands, and closer to home we maintain a garrison of 3,000 troops in Cyprus to maintain the security and integrity of the sovereign base areas.

Tonight, elements of the Army are on exercise in Germany, Canada, Kenya, Jordan and Australia, and they have recently completed a major exercise in Poland. About 250 officers and soldiers serve in training teams assisting the armed forces of our friends.

As the House knows, the Royal Air Force continues to do admirable work in Bosnia, where six Harrier GR7 aircraft based in Gioia, together with a tanker, provide recce support for IFOR. The RAF also provides six Chinook helicopters, which have supported the ground forces. The support helicopter force has done a fantastic job in Bosnia and elsewhere, and I am delighted to mark it out tonight for its admirable work.

In the Gulf, we have six Tornado GR1s, supported by a tanker, which fly as the UK contribution to the southern no-fly zone, and over northern Iraq six Tornados are operating out of Incirli. Fast jets, AWACS—the airborne warning and communication system—support helicopters, transport and maritime aircraft are all involved tonight on training exercises both at home and overseas.

Everywhere I have been, I have been greatly impressed with the high personal standards of RAF personnel. The whole House should know that, this year, they have won a number of extremely important awards that confirm their skill and pre-eminence among all other air crew in the world. The House will particularly wish to congratulate the crew from 72 Squadron, to whom the Princess Royal presented last week the Edward and Maisie Lewis award for the most notable air sea rescue of the year, in extraordinarily difficult circumstances off the Falkland Islands.

There is no doubt that present demands made upon the three services are very heavy. My hon. Friends the Members for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), for Canterbury and for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) have all made that clear. Clearly, they are working to a high level of tasking, and that places real pressures on both men and equipment. I find morale, nevertheless, to be extremely good, but I am under no illusions, nor is anyone here, as to the pressures on service personnel and their families.

I take this opportunity to salute the service wives and their families, and take this chance to thank them for their tolerance and forbearance over the past 12 months. Each of the services is conscious of its obligations for the welfare of its dependants, and I pay tribute to the efforts of those service welfare organisations—from the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association, to the Navy, Army, Air Force Institute to the Royal British Legion—who do so much to support those engaged in the defence of the realm.

I also endorse the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport about the great importance of the medical services. I am pleased that he is pleased about HMS Dolphin, and we shall continue to watch that situation carefully.

I would also like to thank all the civilian staff of the MOD, wherever they may be, who do so much to support military operations. Without them, the armed forces simply could not function. We greatly value and cherish our civilian work force, who have had to cope with formidable change. We are lucky indeed to have such loyal support from our civil servants, at all levels.

Many of the activities undertaken by our armed forces are connected with our allies and partners—as displayed in Bosnia, where we continue to play a central role in our development of closer relations with the countries of central and eastern Europe, where we have the closest possible and burgeoning relationships. We regard these as extremely important. A number of hon. Members, particularly the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury and others, mentioned the importance of the enlargement of NATO.

The opportunity to exercise our forces in countries we used to regard as adversaries is one of the most tangible reminders of just how far we have come in such a short time. I visited the 7th Armoured Brigade on exercise in Poland recently and had an opportunity to see them exercising on testing and unfamiliar terrain with their Polish colleagues. That is surely a remarkably testimony—seven years after the fall of the Berlin wall and more than 57 years since the German invasion of Poland—of the strategic changes that the world has seen.

There are numerous poignant demonstrations of the depth of the defence relations that we have established in the region. A British Army brigadier is serving as special adviser to the Czech Chief of the General Staff. A British colonel is on attachment to the Latvian army as Deputy Chief of the General Staff. Both attachments have provided a permanent and readily available source of advice to their hosts.

The reserve forces continue to make a vital contribution to our defence capabilities. Reservists have been involved in operations in the former Yugoslavia from the very first deployments. All together some 1,700 reservists, the majority from the Territorial Army, have been called out. All have been volunteers and they have performed very well.

A smaller, but no less important, contribution is provided by members of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve who are serving in Turkey in support of the no-fly zone in northern Iraq.We are committed to using our reserves more widely and more flexibly. The Reserve Forces Act 1996 will enable us to do just that. The Act, which has been widely welcomed, updates the law on reserves and provides for their more flexible use, introducing important new safeguards for employers and reservists. This is a very important and useful step forward, and work is now under way to develop the necessary secondary legislation to enable the Act's new powers to operate.

I thank the hon. Member for Motherwell, North for his co-operation and that of his hon. Friends in the Committee in which that Bill was seen through the House of Commons. It was, I agree, an admirable and model way of doing the business.

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West) *rose—*

Mr. Soames: No, I must carry on.

The House will also wish to recognise the wonderful work of the cadet forces. As well as giving many young people their first experience of the armed forces and the service way of life, they play an important wider role in our national life, helping in the development of qualities such as good citizenship, self-reliance and self-confidence. I am grateful to those thousands of adult volunteers and parents who give selflessly of their time to make cadet units an immense success. They are greatly valued.

A number of hon. Members have referred to manning, recruitment and morale. Some hon. Members have rightly expressed concern about levels of recruitment to the armed forces. I am glad to say that recruitment is picking up well. We are not complacent about it, but we are determined to carry on and to ensure that we maintain the good flow of recruits.

Ms Squire *rose—*

Mr. Soames: I will not give way.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, in his opening remarks yesterday, said that the Bett review contained many complex issues and interrelationships which need to be carefully considered. My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury has also spoken of that matter.

I know that the House will agree that those are vital questions which need the most careful and detailed consideration. It is crucial that we take the appropriate time to get them right. More work is required and we will take all the time we need to ensure that we get the right answers. We shall not be rushed into making decisions and the exercise will take some months yet.

While the Labour party postures and poses, with its wholly unbelievable and unreal so-called defence policy, it mocks the ethos of the armed forces with its left-wing obsessions for all the ghastly politically correct nostrums that dominate Labour Members' lives. The Labour party will never be able to understand that the armed forces have a need to be different.

Socialists should remember in their prattling and wittering that, for the young service man and woman of today, the fundamental character of war will remain unchanged. Those highly trained men and women will have to take part in a terrifying contest of wills for which they will need to be highly trained and in which they will have to cope with extreme danger, in rapidly changing circumstances, amid conditions of chaos and uncertainty. Their skills and the quality of their leadership, weapons and equipment will be severely tested.

Such operations are sustainable only by men highly motivated by tremendous pride in their regiment, their corps, their service and their traditions. My hon. Friends and I do not believe that the Labour party has the first idea what that means. It believes those things to be irrelevant abstractions, and it is clear that they neither appreciate nor understand us.

What the House heard last night from the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) was a fraud and a sham. A Labour defence policy consists of a succession of formulae designed to enable people who profoundly disagree to persuade themselves that they are in total agreement. It will not wash and the country will not buy it, because ordinary people know, as do Conservative Members, that Labour, old or new, simply does not care about defence. To Labour, defence simply does not matter. It is not a priority. But all the qualities that mark out the services as being so admirable and formidable are wholly inimical and entirely contrary to socialists' left-wing beliefs. They are entirely alien concepts to socialist Labour, old or new.

We on the Conservative Benches cannot and will not ever forget the spineless craven folly of the same people on the Opposition Benches and their reckless and grotesque flirtation with CND and other fellow travellers in the 1980s. When it mattered, Labour bottled out and chucked in the sponge. If Labour had been in power in the 80s there would have been no cruise missiles and no Trident. There might have been serious consequences to our national security. Labour proved then once and for all that it can never be trusted with defence.

This pathetic and wholly implausible attempt by Labour spokesmen to suggest that there can be consensus between us on major defence issues is not sustainable because of their record. I recommend that my hon. Friends remember that 18 of the 24 present members of the shadow Cabinet were formerly CND members. They are not to be trusted on defence. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to reject the amendment and to vote for the "Statement on the Defence Estimates".

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 253, Noes 290.

Division No. 214

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy

Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dixon, Rt Hon Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Miss Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretf'd)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cummings and Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas–Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'fd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*

Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Rev William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangf'd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House approves the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1996 contained in Cm. 3223.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the motion in the name of Secretary Sir George Young relating to the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Asylum (Designated Countries)

10.16 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I beg to move,

That the draft Asylum (Designated Countries of Destination and Designated Safe Third Countries) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 14th October, be approved.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If the order is passed, it will have a great effect on many hon. Members' advice services, so I shall attempt to raise it with my usual mix of charity and cynicism. The order was announced as business at 4 pm yesterday, but I understand that it was not placed in the Vote Office until 4.30. We have therefore had only a very limited time in which to consider its merits and to hear observations from the many organisations that will be affected by it.

If such a limited time is in order, I am sure that the speed at which the order is to be dealt with will give rise to some concern. If it is in order, is there any way in which the business can be postponed for further consultation?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): The hon. Gentleman knows in his heart that it is perfectly in order and that his point of order was a matter of argument.

Miss Widdecombe: I cannot resist commenting on what the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) attempted to pass as a point of order. The seven countries now listed were in fact proposed by the Secretary of State as long ago as December 1995, on Second Reading of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996. The hon. Gentleman has therefore had plenty of time to work out what he wishes to say.

The order designates seven countries as safe countries of destination under schedule 2(5) to the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 as substituted by the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996. The order also designates four countries as safe third countries under section 2 of the 1996 Act.

The effect of designating a country as a safe country of destination is that refused applications will normally attract the accelerated appeal procedure that already operates in certain other types of case. The designation of safe third countries has the effect of enabling an applicant for asylum who can be returned to a third country to be removed there without waiting for any appeal against the decision to consider his claim substantively.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Will the Minister give way?

Miss Widdecombe: It is somewhat early in my speech, but I will give way.

Mr. Carlile: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way somewhat early. I should like her to deal with something in the order. Will she tell us whether the words in paragraph 2 of the order,

"in general no serious risk of persecution",

are to be taken to mean that, for some people, the Government accept that there is a risk of persecution? If not, what other meaning are we to ascribe to the introduction of the words "in general"?

Miss Widdecombe: The words "in general" mean exactly that: in general. We have repeatedly made the point that, even in those countries in which there is general safety, some people will have a well-founded fear of persecution. That is exactly why, as the hon. and learned Gentleman well knows, a small number of people qualify either for asylum or for exceptional leave to remain even in those countries that produce a very high percentage of rejections every year. I think that the hon. and learned Gentleman knows that, but had he waited he would have heard me repeat it.

In relation to both types of designation, the overall purpose is to enable asylum applications to be dealt with more speedily and effectively, without departing in any way from the principle that each case is to be considered on its individual merits and without detriment to the position of any genuine refugee.

The seven countries designated as safe countries of destination are Bulgaria, Cyprus, Ghana, India, Pakistan, Poland and Romania. Those are the same seven countries which, during Parliament's consideration of the Asylum and Immigration Bill, the Government stated were being considered as candidates for designation. We believe that each of those countries has functioning institutions, stability and pluralism in sufficient measure to support an assessment that the general level of risk to people living in the country is sufficiently low to warrant designation.

We have made available—I am sure that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) will wish to read it—an explanatory note on the designation of the seven countries, in addition to background country assessments setting out the Government's view of the general conditions in each of them.

We have also made clear the three main criteria that must be met for us to consider designation appropriate. The first criterion is that there is, in general, no serious risk of persecution in that country or territory. The second criterion is that the number of asylum applications in the United Kingdom from its nationals is significant. The third is that a very high percentage of applications are refused on examination.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): The Minister has mentioned the home country assessment. Will she say how long those documents have been in preparation? Will she confirm or deny that reputable human rights organisations based in this country have been consulted about the views on human rights—particularly in India and Pakistan—expressed in those documents?

Miss Widdecombe: As I said in answer to an earlier intervention, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State mentioned the seven countries as long ago as December 1995. Obviously, it was open to people to make representations to us once those countries were mentioned. Some people did so, and I met a group about the issue of safety in Pakistan.

We have taken into account not only detailed information and deliberation by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, but a range of information from

other bodies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Amnesty International. The reports have had various times for preparation, according to which of the seven countries they dealt with, but they have been extremely detailed. They have not—if this is the question of the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden)—been rushed at the last minute. Full consideration has been given to the detail in those reports. If, when he has read them—he may already have done so as I know that he is very quick—the hon. Gentleman wishes to raise with me any particular issues relating to statements that we have made on those assessments, I shall be delighted to meet him or to engage in correspondence with him on those points.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid–Kent): My hon. Friend will be aware that, in some of the countries that have been designated, the way in which the ruling party most commonly asserts a slight shift in its religious stance is to take it out on the Christian minority. Will she give an assurance that her Department and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will be properly aware of the extraordinary vulnerability of Christians in Muslim countries which may suddenly wish to send a signal about being more or less fundamentalist, and do so by victimising Christian minorities?

Miss Widdecombe: I can of course give my hon. Friend the assurance that we will make sure that we are aware of any minority who are suffering in any way. But when people apply to this country for asylum, as my hon. Friend well knows, we have to assess each individual case on its merits. We do not create classes of persons who are automatically entitled to asylum. Each case will have to be established on its merits.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): I thank the Minister for giving way. Is she aware of the recent heightened tension in Cyprus, where at the weekend a Greek Cypriot was tragically shot by Turkish forces? Has she taken that into account when designating Cyprus as a safe country?

Miss Widdecombe: I repeat yet again that every individual case is considered on its merits. The fact that a country has been designated does not mean that people who claim that they are victims of circumstances—whether circumstances that were known to us when we designated the country concerned or any subsequent circumstances—will not still have the full right to have their cases individually and thoroughly considered. If we did any less, we would be in breach of our obligations under the Geneva convention.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Will the Minister give way?

Miss Widdecombe: I will give way once more only.

Mr. Fraser: Is the Minister aware that the constitution of Pakistan contains provisions which stigmatise Ahmadis and condemn them to long periods of imprisonment simply for claiming that they are Muslims, and that laws against Christians are enshrined in the constitution of Pakistan? How can one say that a country is generally safe when the constitution itself contains provisions of that nature, which no party in Pakistan has the guts to repeal?

Miss Widdecombe: We would consider whether an Ahmadi in that situation faced persecution, whether he could go to a centre such as Rabwah where he would be safe, or whether he could go elsewhere in the country where he would be safe. If he could not, we would consider the circumstances that constituted a genuine and well-founded fear of persecution. Each individual who applies to us, on whatever basis, will have such questions asked.

I want now to make progress, because I am getting a series of questions about the individual Governments of the countries concerned. They are all answered by one point which I cannot stress enough—that every individual case will be fully considered. The creation of a designated list is not the creation of a blanket ban, or even the creation of a presumption of refusal: it is straightforwardly an accelerated procedure. Designation is not a new concept unique to the—

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Will the Minister give way?

Miss Widdecombe: I normally give way to Opposition Front-Bench Members, but I did say that the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) was the last Member to whom I would give way.

Mr. Straw: I should be very grateful.

Miss Widdecombe: All right, but then the hon. Gentleman has had his chance.

Mr. Straw: Will the Minister reflect on the statement that she has just made? She said that the white list did not lead to a rebuttable presumption that an application was unfounded. But the background paper published by her own Department said exactly the opposite.

Miss Widdecombe: What I said—as the hon. Member for Blackburn will see if he consults *Hansard*—is that there would be "no presumption of refusal". If somebody puts in an application, it will be considered on its merits. We shall not start with the idea that we are turning down an application, regardless of its merits. That is what I said, and if Opposition Members listen to the debate, they will learn what the designated list is all about. It is not a new concept and it is not unique to the United Kingdom. Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark and Finland already operate similar arrangements.

We have stressed on many occasions the safeguards built into the designation principle. There will be no blanket ban on claims from designated countries. Each claim will be considered on its merits, and an applicant will still have an appeal to an independent adjudicator. Last year, at least 97 per cent. of claims from nationals of the seven countries were refused—more than 6,750 applications. Those claims that are refused will attract the accelerated appeal procedure. Moreover, if the adjudicator agrees that the application is unfounded, that will be the end of the matter. There will be no further avenue of appeal to the immigration tribunal.

[Miss Widdecombe]

In short, designation will allow the asylum process to deal quickly with the large number of unfounded applications that we currently receive from countries which are, in general, safe, while recognising the small number of applicants from such countries who may have genuine claims.

In determining which countries should be designated, we are required to make a judgment about whether the general level of risk to people living in a country is sufficiently low to warrant designation. The words

"in general no serious risk of persecution"

in the fifth paragraph of schedule 2 to the Asylum and Immigration Act 1993 make that quite clear. Designation does not mean that a country should be universally "safe" or that its institutions should function in every respect to western standards. The wording of the Act clearly rules out the designation of any country where there is a significant level of persecution, even if it is targeted only at minorities.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): Will the Minister give way?

Miss Widdecombe: No, I wish to make some progress.

The list of countries that we have proposed for designation excludes a number of countries which generate large numbers of unfounded asylum claims but in which there are nevertheless sufficient concerns about human rights that the requirement of the Act is not met. An obvious example would be Nigeria.

I now refer to the second part of the order and the designation of safe third countries. The Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 provided that, in cases where the safe third country concerned is a member state of the European Union, applicants may exercise their right of appeal only after they have left the UK. Hon. Members may recall that we proposed this change because we were finding that delays caused by the appeals process were making it difficult to effect removals in many cases where it was clear that the third country was perfectly safe for the applicant.

We stated during parliamentary discussions on the Act that we were considering using the power provided in section 2(3) of the 1996 Act to extend this procedure to certain selected non-EU states. The United States, Canada and Switzerland were mentioned in the debate. To these, the asylum order adds Norway. Taken together, those states constitute the majority of present non-EU third country cases. I do not intend to describe in any detail why we consider each of the countries to be suitable for designation. They are all states with long-established and respected human rights records. A detailed description of the countries' asylum laws and procedures, together with an explanation of why we are satisfied that returned asylum seekers would be treated in accordance with the UN convention, is set out in the individual appraisals for each country that we have made available to Parliament.

I commend the order to the House.

10.33 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): We oppose the order, and we shall vote against it. Anyone who was in any doubt about the merits of the order need only have listened to the disingenuous sophistry that we heard from the Minister of State a moment ago.

By international conventions, the United Kingdom is bound to consider each asylum application on its merits, but the so-called white list of designated countries will in practice prevent that from happening. Under this system, all applicants from countries on the list will be presumed to be bogus—without foundation—unless they can prove otherwise.

Miss Widdecombe *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Straw: The Minister disagrees, but she is damned out of her own mouth. She says that there is no presumption of refusal. In that case I ask her why the Home Office—she has endorsed the words time and again—said that the white list would set up a rebuttable presumption that asylum applications from designated countries were unfounded. If they are unfounded, they will be refused.

The truth is the reverse of what the Minister has said: there is a presumption of refusal. That is exactly what the House was told by the Home Office when the white list was introduced. If there is no presumption of refusal, what purpose is served by a white list? The Minister tried to weave her way through the contortions of her argument by implying that there would be no difference between the treatment of an applicant from a white list country and an applicant from a country that is not on the list. If so, I repeat: what purpose is served by the white list?

Miss Widdecombe: If the hon. Gentleman were a genuine applicant wanting his asylum application considered, would he not be grateful for any measure that speeded up the processing of unfounded claims?

Mr. Straw: I would be grateful, whatever country I came from, if that were so, but the Government are not taking genuine steps to speed up the process and ensure that each application is considered on its merits. They are cobbling together an arrangement that suggests that people from the designated countries are at no general risk of persecution. Thereafter, those applicants will most certainly be treated as second-class applicants, and their applications stand to be refused unless they can rebut the presumption of refusal.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I want to quote the hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir J. Critchley), who got it exactly right in a letter to *The Times* of July this year. We are all sorry that the hon. Member cannot be here tonight. Writing about this system, he said:

"It is of course impossible to distinguish the genuine from the fraudulent until a case has been thoroughly examined".

The result, he added, is that the system will

"affect the genuine refugee as well"

as the bogus refugee. We oppose the principle behind the white list and, in government, we shall not operate it.

The white list's only purpose is to put applicants from the designated countries at a disadvantage. Its operation, in our judgment, conflicts with the spirit of our international obligations.

Mr. Stephen: The hon. Gentleman says that there is a rebuttable presumption. If the presumption is rebuttable,

surely that means that the applicant has an opportunity to rebut it. How, therefore, can the hon. Gentleman maintain that the applicant has no right to have his case heard on its merits?

Mr. Straw: It is always delightful to give way to the hon. Gentleman because he is always so badly informed. It was not I who maintained that there was a rebuttable presumption: it was the Government. It was a Home Office background paper published just over a year ago which said it. The hon. Gentleman should think about this and perhaps write a submission to the Secretary of State about it—

Mr. Stephen: Give way.

Mr. Straw:—before he stands up again and makes a fool of himself. The simple question for him concerns what purpose the white list serves if it is not to disadvantage certain applicants and to ensure that the merits of an application from a country on the white list will be less well considered than those of an application from elsewhere.

On Second Reading of the Asylum and Immigration Bill, the Secretary of State said that one of the criteria that he would adopt in selecting countries for designation was that, in general, there was no serious risk of persecution—but the countries selected are not those that generally feature at the top of any list of nations that are celebrated for their protection of human rights. Bulgaria, Ghana, Pakistan, Poland and Romania would not be at the top of any such list. It is no coincidence that the countries that celebrate and protect human rights are not on that list—generally, they do not generate any asylum seekers. Instead, almost without exception, each of the countries on the list has had a recent history of profound political unrest or of continuing instability in one area or with some minority group.

Ms Lynne: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is strange that India is on that list, considering the human rights record in Indian-held Kashmir, where torture, rape and killings happen regularly?

Mr. Straw: It is strange that any country is on the list, but the choice of the countries that are on the list is especially strange, for reasons that I shall explain.

If we look down the list, we can see that the first criterion—the claim that, in general, there is no serious risk of persecution in a country—has been subordinated to the Home Secretary's second and third criteria, which are that the countries generate a significant number of asylum claims and that a high proportion prove to be unfounded. It is worse than that. Ministers have had to turn themselves into apologists for the poor human rights record of many of those countries to make them qualify for inclusion.

In the short time available, I wish to illustrate my point by reference to one of the countries on the list: Pakistan. I have no doubt that my hon. Friends will make similar points about most of the other countries on the list. I have many constituents who come from Pakistan. I have visited the country and I follow its history and politics with great interest. Most of my constituents from Pakistan, whatever their political affiliations in that country, would regard the country assessment published by the Home Office as a joke. It is a risible but revealing document, riddled with inconsistency and designed to justify the unjustifiable.

The document is supposed to provide immigration officers and caseworkers with a feel for the country and some assessment of how it operates and its politics, but it does not refer to the single most traumatic event in Pakistan's political history—the death of Benazir Bhutto's father, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who was executed by the military dictatorship of General Zia ul-Haq in 1979. There is not one reference to those events, and nothing about the dictatorship of General Zia—or about the dictator's death in mysterious circumstances in 1985. No sense is therefore given of the potent role that political violence has played, sadly, in Pakistan almost throughout its history.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): Could the hon. Gentleman kindly tell the House what conceivable relevance those events have to the situation in Pakistan today?

Mr. Straw: That intervention merely shows the strength of my case that the document is a joke—and so are the comments of the Home Secretary. He is damned out of his own mouth. What relevance does the execution of Bhutto in 1979 have now?

Mr. Howard *rose*—

Mr. Straw: I am answering the Home Secretary's question, if he will sit down.

What relevance does the dictatorship of Zia have for today's events? I will tell him. Zia executed Bhutto, Zia came to power and Zia passed Ordinance XX, which made it illegal for the Ahmadis to claim that they are Muslims. That has led to 2,400 Ahmadis facing trial for blasphemy under that law and 21 facing the prospect of death. That is the relevance, and I am astonished that the Home Secretary has omitted that information.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. His answer has strayed so far from my question that it shows his complete unfitness to stand at the Dispatch Box. The party of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto is the present Government of Pakistan and the daughter of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto is the present Prime Minister of Pakistan, so what conceivable relevance does the death of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, which happened all those years ago, have to present conditions in Pakistan?

Mr. Straw: It helps people to understand that Pakistan has a long and continuing history of serious political violence. The Secretary of State talks about the Bhutto family as though the violence that it has suffered happened 17 or 18 years ago. Is he not aware—the document says nothing about it—that Benazir Bhutto's brother was the subject of a political killing on 27 September? Are we conveniently to ignore that killing so that the Secretary of State can whitewash Pakistan's human rights record?

This document is about whitewashing the records of countries such as Pakistan to force them into the Government's designated list. Rarely have I seen a Secretary of State (so clearly) damned out of his own

[Mr. Straw]

mouth by his ignorance of the state of a country that he has designated. He asks what relevance the country's history has. The document goes all the way back to 1947; it is not as though it talks only about the past few years.

Although the people who wrote it clearly thought that history was of some importance, they decided to fillet the history. They say that Pakistan was set up in 1947 and is an

"Islamic republic with a system of parliamentary democracy."

I happen to think that it is useful to know that that system of parliamentary democracy has had the occasional hiccup, with military dictatorships, the killing of Prime Ministers, and the political killing of the brother of the present Prime Minister. As my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) said, ordinances and laws passed by the dictatorship are still in force as a result of the present Government's refusal to change them, because, in my view, they are too cowardly to do so.

In properly functioning democracies, it is unusual for the Prime Minister's brother to be the subject of a political killing, as happened recently in Pakistan. The fact that that killing is not mentioned in this country assessment simply illustrates how quickly the assessments, even if they were accurate, can become out of date.

The country assessment on Pakistan blithely claims—my hon. Friends should weigh these words with care—that

"as a democracy there is freedom of opinion and assembly"

with, for example, a thriving newspaper industry, generally free to discuss public issues. But even the report's authors knew that they could not tax the incredulity of their readers too far, so they go on to admit, in respect of newspapers, that

"the government retains the power of confiscation for a wide range of prohibitions"—

on newspapers—

"which are prejudicial to the maintenance of public order."

The report goes on to say:

"The government though does exercise a certain amount of pressure on the free press".

The British Government exercise a certain amount of pressure on the free press, so they will know all about that. But in Pakistan's case, it is not tea at the Prime Minister's residence or even the offer of the Pakistani equivalent of a knighthood to compliant editors, but

"the withdrawal of government advertising revenue on which the papers depend"

and therefore their temporary closure. That is the minor pressure that is placed on editors in Pakistan. If they step out of line, the "free press" is simply closed down. The document goes on to say:

"Newspaper offices have also been raided by the security forces".

The document also reveals arguments that undermine much of the Government's approach to asylum issues. Throughout the debate earlier this year, we claimed that most asylum applications were related to the sense of fear felt by particular communities as a result of political instability. The Government simply countered that most applications were bogus and somehow arose in a random way or as a result of economic forces. The most oppressed group in Pakistan is, by general agreement, the Ahmadis. It is no surprise—even this document admits—that there are now no applications from supporters of Mrs. Bhutto's Pakistan People's party and lots of applications from that oppressed group, the Ahmadis.

I have already spelt out to the House the fact that, although General Zia ul-Haq died in 1985, his dictatorial legacy lives on in the objectionable Ordinance XX, which prohibits Ahmadis from declaring that they are Muslims and carries serious penalties for those who do—some 2,400 Ahmadis are being processed under the ordinance. In addition, it provides for the death penalty for Ahmadis for blasphemy, and 21 are currently awaiting trial. That is the state of affairs in a country where the Minister says that there is no general fear of persecution. I believe that that is an utterly disgraceful statement, which takes no account of the real situation in Pakistan.

The country assessment sought to make light of the little local difficulties faced by the Ahmadis. It says that their rights

"are safeguarded under the [Pakistan] constitution".

Conveniently, the assessment's overall conclusion is:

"there is no evidence of government led persecution of minorities . . . where discrimination or harassment does occur, it emanates from the actions of individuals or groups at local level".

That conclusion is disputed by all human rights groups who know anything about the situation in Pakistan and we now know that it is also disputed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I have a copy of a letter, which was sent to me recently, from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to the Minister without Portfolio, the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney). Dated May 1996, it refers to the problems faced by the Ahmadis, and states:

"The main problems faced by the Ahmadi community stem from a . . . Constitutional Amendment which designates Ahmadis as non-muslims and from the blasphemy laws which specifically make certain expressions of the Ahmadi faith illegal."

It continues:

"Radical sectarian groups and individuals have taken encouragement from these laws, and have carried out attacks against Ahmadis. In some cases there are credible reports that the local authorities have given tacit support to these actions."

The letter confirms two things—first, that at local level it is not, as the Minister's country assessment suggests, unofficial groups or individuals who are harassing Ahmadis but the official local authorities. They are part of the Government and, in Pakistan, are usually under the thumb of the provincial governor who, in turn, is appointed by the President. In other words, those local authorities are part of the Government apparatus.

Secondly, the Foreign Office letter confirms that the fundamental cause of the abuse of Ahmadis is not the unofficial actions of a few groups or individuals, but the result of the Government's actions in sustaining the objectionable Ordinance XX. I am glad to learn that the Pakistan Government wish to change the law, but the simple fact is that it is on the statute book, it is in force and 2,400 Ahmadis are awaiting trial as a result of its objectionable nature.

During Second Reading of the Asylum and Immigration Bill, I referred hon. Members to the experience of the United States in the matter of "white lists". In the 1980s, the United States faced a much more difficult situation regarding asylum than that which confronts this country today. It considered the idea of a

white list procedure, but it wisely discarded the proposal before it was brought into force. It thought that the process of deciding whether a country should go on or come off the white list would embroil, complicate and compromise the United States Government regarding that country's human rights record. It also believed that the standing of the United States could be damaged in the process and that many more court actions—the equivalent of our judicial review—could result.

The United States Government were right on every count and the British Government are wrong on every count. The white list, and the country assessments on which the list is based, are partial, defective and profoundly unfair. They will hit the genuine applicant as hard as the bogus applicant and they will damage the United Kingdom's reputation as a defender of human rights. We shall oppose the order in the Lobby tonight.

10.54 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I shall not detain the House for long, but I wish to raise a procedural point. I hope that it will not delay the continuation of a highly charged and serious debate that concerns us all.

The order does not contain a compliance cost assessment. The Government say that every Bill that comes before the House should be scrutinised to assess the cost that will have to be met by private business. The Government wish to avoid putting any extra burden on private business.

The concept of assessment in every statutory instrument and every Act was not, understandably, a feature of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, except in the sections dealing with employment and the cost to industry in terms of establishing the status of new employees. That was because private business was affected.

I raise this technical point because, on 22 May 1996, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, in a measured and thoughtful speech, said that cost compliance assessment would be considered to be extended to public costs as well as private costs. That meant that every Bill and every statutory instrument would contain a compliance cost assessment that took account of the additional burden on the public purse on the basis of whether more staff and administrative support would be required.

I expected to find in the order a compliance cost assessment of the additional burden on the public purse. It is not there. Will there be no cost to the public purse, or have the Government yet to decide whether to extend the compliance cost assessment to public costs as well as private costs?

Last year, Lady Blatch, the Minister of State in the other place, said that the number of asylum caseworkers had increased eightfold to nearly 800, and that the Government were investing an additional £37 million to provide for even more caseworkers and adjudicators. The order is silent about additional costs. I understand that there may be some, bearing it in mind that the number of decisions taken has increased from 21,000 in 1994 to 27,000 last year. The number of new claimants reached 44,000 last year.

The Government are committed to less bureaucracy, less officialdom and less red tape. It is not our fault that there are now more asylum seekers than ever before, but why hide the cost of dealing with them? We cannot commit ourselves to compliance cost assessment, which is part of the Government's deregulationary initiative, only to ignore it in the first order to come before us after the summer recess.

10.57 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I shall concentrate my remarks on Bulgaria, but first I shall make a few general remarks. When we debated the Asylum and Immigration Bill on Second Reading and in Committee—the issue was taken up earlier this evening—it was said that a list of countries would have no effect on individuals. It is one of the most ludicrous suggestions that I have ever heard. It has been admitted this evening, as it was by the Secretary of State on Second Reading, that a country's inclusion in the list will lead to the assumption that an individual's application is not well founded. It defies common sense to pretend that such a person's application will be treated in the same way as an application from a person whose country is not on the list. It is a nonsensical argument. No one outside the House could conceivably believe it.

I would have a little more respect for those who are advancing the argument if they were honest enough to say, "We are producing a list of countries from which we intend to reject applications." That is what the list is about. I would have more respect for those concerned if they were up front about their intentions. Instead they are engaging in the ludicrous pretence that people from all countries will be treated in the same way.

In any event, any applicant must prove that his or her fear of persecution is well founded.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Is not my hon. Friend really saying what was said in "Alice in Wonderland" by the Queen of Hearts: Sentence first, trial later?

Mr. Gerrard: That sums it up. It is the guilty until proven innocent approach to the problem. The fact that few people from a particular country—for example, Bulgaria—are given asylum does not in any way justify treating applicants from that country differently. It is interesting to look at what has happened with Bulgaria over the past few years. One person was granted asylum in 1992; there were none in 1993, none in 1994, but five were given exceptional leave. There were none in 1995, but one was given exceptional leave.

The number of applications has been increasing. Why? Those figures do not seem to suggest that anybody could conceivably think that applying for asylum is a soft touch if a person comes from Bulgaria. They are almost all being refused, anyway. But the numbers are going up, and that seems to suggest that something must be happening in Bulgaria to provoke people to apply for asylum.

Anyone who has read the country report—even the Home Office country report—or any human rights organisations' papers on Bulgaria will know of the way in which Roma in particular but also other ethnic minority groups suffer. The Home Office country assessment talks about local inter-ethnic tensions; about widespread resentment of Roma; and about discrimination and violence against Roma, which continue to occur.

[Mr. Gerrard]

It does not, of course, mention the fact that Bulgaria is one of only five countries in the Council of Europe that refused to sign the framework convention on the protection of national minorities. It is not the strongest of frameworks, but Bulgaria refused to sign it, and said that it would be against its national interest.

Human rights organisations, such as Amnesty, that look at Bulgaria quote many examples: for example, in April 1993, an assembly of Macedonians was interrupted by the police and people were beaten. In 1994, the robbery of an inhabitant of a small town sparked retaliations against Roma in the area and 20 families' homes were ransacked and destroyed. There are many documented examples of discrimination against such minorities and many reports of police violence and brutality—again, particularly against ethnic minorities in Bulgaria. At the very least, that calls into question the ability of the authorities to provide protection.

Refugee status does not depend on persecution by the state. The United Nations convention makes it absolutely clear that where discriminatory or offensive acts are committed by the local populace they can be considered as persecution if they are tolerated by the authorities or if the authorities refuse to provide protection. That is precisely what happens to people of Romany origin in countries such as Bulgaria.

The Home Office country report goes to great lengths about what has happened to the legal system in Bulgaria, but again the United Nations says that the laws of the country of origin, but particularly the manner in which they are applied, will be relevant. The fact that there is a law that says that there should not be discrimination, but that it is not applied, should be taken into consideration.

I have absolutely no doubt that the white list will lead to discrimination and to injustice, that assumptions will be made about people without looking at their individual case properly. I return to the point with which I started. Nobody can possibly pretend that this system is fair, that it treats people from the white list the same as people who are not on it. What would be the point of a white list if that happened? It is a nonsensical argument. I would have more respect if people were more honest about what they were doing.

11.4 pm

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): I am grateful for the opportunity, which was denied me by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) in the course of his speech, to reply to his rude and, frankly, ignorant response to the point that I put to him. He dodged responding to the substantive issue by relying upon a debating point which, when he reads *Hansard* tomorrow, even he will see is a false point.

The hon. Gentleman argued that the order deprives an applicant of a hearing of his case on the merits. He accepted or maintained, I care not which, that the presumption raised by the order was a rebuttable one. If the presumption is rebuttable, the applicant will have an opportunity to rebut it. In other words—let me spell it out to the hon. Gentleman—an applicant will have an opportunity to put his case and have it heard on the merits. Therefore, how can the hon. Gentleman possibly argue that the order deprives an applicant of a hearing of his case on the merits?

If the applicant happens to be an Ahmadi from Pakistan, I have no doubt that he will say, "I am an Ahmadi from Pakistan," and I have no doubt that he will make the kind of arguments that we have heard this evening. Those arguments will be listened to. The case will be decided on its merits. That will probably also apply to anyone who says, "I am a Romany from Bulgaria." It is obvious that the order speeds up the process of dealing with asylum applicants, particularly paragraphs 2 and 3.

In the speeches of Opposition Ms—no doubt we shall be regaled by more of them in the course of the debate—the attitude seems to be that anyone who comes from a country whose standards are lower than ours in the United Kingdom should have asylum. That argument applies to just about every country in the world.

Opposition Members must know that a large number of asylum applicants to this country are bogus applicants. They must also know that the large number of bogus applicants weigh down our system to the great detriment of the genuine applicants, for whose plight they do not seem to care. All they can say is that more money should be put into the system. I would rather put more money into the pockets of the pensioners in my constituency. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members always come out in their true colours. They say one thing but do another. They say they want to put more money into the pockets of the pensioners, when really they want to put more money into the pockets of the bureaucrats—same old Labour. They are just the same as they always were.

I cannot imagine how Labour Members think that even their own voters support their ridiculous attitude to immigration into this country.

11.7 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Yes, well, Madam Deputy Speaker, is all that one can say about the contribution of the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen).

The order is about speed, not justice. That is the simple message that is sent to the House. The message is clear from the explanatory note, which reminds us that the order provides part of the machinery for an "accelerated appeal procedure". It is not a more effective, more efficient or a more just and equitable appeal procedure: it is an accelerated appeal procedure.

The order establishes a rebuttable presumption against asylum status for those coming from white list countries. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Shoreham can sit still for a moment, try to concentrate and put all his silly notions out of his mind, I will tell him what a rebuttable presumption is.

Let me draw a picture for the hon. Gentleman in his mind of the scales of justice. When civil litigation of any kind starts, the scales of justice are evenly balanced. But in this instance there is a rebuttable presumption, so—if the hon. Gentleman will concentrate again for a moment—a bag of rotten apples is being put in one side of the scales of justice.

That is what a rebuttable presumption is. That is what it means. Metaphorically speaking, asylum seekers from one of the white list countries must eat the bag of rotten apples first, and then present their case. I ask the Minister, who I know is excited by the debate, to concentrate for a few moments, because I hope that we will receive an answer to this when the debate is wound up.

I respectfully submit to the House that the Government are doing this contrary to two international treaty obligations.

Miss Widdecombe: Nonsense.

Mr. Carlile: The Minister can reply later. I am glad that she is listening.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): Name the obligations.

Mr. Carlile: I will. The first is article 3 of the 1951 United Nations convention, which states:

"The contracting states shall apply the provisions of this Convention to refugees without discrimination as to race, religion, or country of origin."

It is plain that the white list discriminates against country of origin. What is a white list if it is not a deliberate act by Government to set one lot of countries of origin against another lot of countries of origin? Part of the rationale behind the United States Government's decision not to have a white list system is exactly that they understand article 3 of the 1951 convention.

But the order is also contrary to article 13 of the European convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms—I know that the Government do not like it, but we have been in it since 1948—because it provides that—*[Interruption.]* I wonder why the Minister finds this terribly funny. If she would like to intervene and tell us the joke, I would be pleased to hear it, and so would this country's asylum seekers.

Miss Widdecombe: The joke is the sheer ineptitude of the hon. and learned Gentleman's argument. If the creation of a designated list were against international law, why is it valid in so many other countries?

Mr. Carlile: The hon. Lady must tell us exactly what advice—she must place it in the Library—she has received from Government lawyers and from outside counsel, if the Government have taken it, as to whether—*[Interruption.]* She seems to find this whole thing a joke. I will give way to the Minister in a moment, but this subject is not regarded as one for hilarity by the many thousands of people who fear that, if they are returned to countries such as India or Pakistan, they will be persecuted.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Does the hon. and learned Gentleman agree that it ill behoves Ministers to talk about ineptitude when, not once but twice, the spirit of the legislation has been knocked back in the courts as contrary to all tenets of human justice?

Mr. Carlile: The hon. Lady makes a good point. I was going to remind the Minister that the order appears, at least to me, to breach article 13 of the European convention. The order amounts to an ineffective remedy, because of the introduction of the presumption, and it runs contrary to the Council of Europe resolution of 20 June 1995, in that it gives only 10 days for the asylum seeker to prepare his appeal, which cannot be regarded as adequate time to do so.

There is a world of difference between someone who fears real persecution if he is sent back, for example, to Pakistan preparing such an appeal and the purring motor of the high-cost sector of civil litigation, where interlocutory appeals can occasionally be heard within seven or 14 days. The scales of justice are nothing more than the digestion of prejudice by euphemism. The presumption against asylum seekers from these countries is institutionalising prejudice against every applicant from every one of those countries, and the Minister knows it.

The order is all about one thing, and one thing only. It gets the Government out of one of the biggest cock-ups—and that is saying something—that even they have ever created. They have been running the immigration and asylum service for the past 17 years. They have allowed the system to get into the mess it is in.

Miss Widdecombe: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlile: No, I will not give way.

The Minister of State does not like hearing this, but it is true that the Government have created this chaos.

Miss Widdecombe *rose—*

Mr. Carlile: I will not give way. The hon. Lady should wait and stop interrupting. She, on behalf of the Government, has created the utter mess that has led to a huge backlog of cases. We are discriminating against people because the Government cannot run the Department properly.

I do not believe that the Minister can deny that people will be sent back to persecution, and possibly even death, as a result of the political regimes in their own countries—a number have already been mentioned—because the Government cannot run their asylum service properly.

11.15 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I do not share the concerns of the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) about Bulgaria. Nor do I share the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) about Poland. Both those countries are now full members of the democratic community—the Council of Europe. They have signed the European convention on human rights—

Ms Abbott: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Atkinson: No, I shall continue for the time being.

That convention offers the strongest possible protection of human rights—our citizens and members of the Council of Europe are protected by it. Those countries have all held free and fair elections, which is why we allowed them to become full members of the Council of Europe. Both Bulgaria and Poland have strong and active human rights organisations—a residue of their communist days—that know how to operate the machinery of the European Court of Human Rights. Therefore, I do not share the concerns expressed about those countries being designated as safe countries.

I should say in response to the suggestion that Bulgaria has not yet signed the framework convention on minorities that the hon. Member for Walthamstow must

[Mr. Atkinson]

surely know that that has only just come into being. A large number of member states of the Council of Europe have yet to sign it. I have no doubt that Bulgaria will sign it after its presidential elections, which are to be held next month. I have no problems with any member states that are full members of the Council of Europe.

However, I do share some of the concerns that have been expressed about the situation in Pakistan—not least by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Kent (Mr. Rowe). I expressed my concerns at Report stage of the Asylum and Immigration Bill on 21 February.

In response to those concerns, my hon. Friend the Minister of State gave certain assurances, which she has repeated this evening. She also gave those assurances to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) and me when we discussed the situation in Pakistan at a private meeting with her and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. The Home Secretary had only just returned from Pakistan, where he had seen the situation for himself—unlike many other people.

In view of the concerns that have been expressed so forcibly by the hon. Member for Blackburn this evening, will my hon. Friend the Minister use the opportunity of her response to point out once again that no Pakistani Christian or member of the Ahmadi sect who applies for asylum in this country and is being subjected to harassment, threat of assassination, life imprisonment or the death penalty for violating section 295(c) of the Pakistani penal code—the blasphemy law—will face the threat of being refused asylum if they have a strong enough case?

Miss Widdecombe: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that no one applying for asylum in this country who has a strong enough case—who makes the case of a well-founded fear of persecution, and sustains the merits of that case—will be refused asylum.

Mr. Atkinson: I am delighted to hear that repetition, which I know the whole House will have noted and—hopefully—found reassuring.

On Report, I referred to a number of Pakistani Christians who had been killed by Muslims because they were Christian. Since then, a new case has been drawn to my attention. To safeguard his identity, he is codenamed Pastor Sam. He converted to Christianity in 1973, since when he has suffered maltreatment, harassment, police beatings, illegal custody, torture and other abuse. Since his Christian marriage, he has been targeted by Islamic extremists, who have falsely accused him of a minor affray in order to have him arrested, after which he would have undoubtedly met death in custody. He was, however, bailed. He is now in hiding awaiting a magistrate's response to allegations of blasphemy under section 295(c) of the Pakistan penal code, which would certainly be accompanied by a charge of apostasy if and when he were arrested, and followed by certain death.

I understand that Pastor Sam and his family will apply for asylum in this country, or will do so shortly on their arrival here. I have sent his details to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, urging that their applications be given the most compassionate consideration. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can assure me tonight that, as she has already stressed, the effect of this order will in no way prejudice the applications for asylum from Pastor Sam and his family and others like them in Pakistan.

11.21 pm

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): The principle at stake in this debate is that each asylum application should be assessed on its merits alone. It is the Opposition's contention that the inclusion of a country in the designated list will undermine such individual assessment by creating a presumption against the credibility of that asylum application from a national of a designated country. We have heard nothing from the Minister to allay those anxieties.

The Minister repeatedly said in Committee that each applicant will be treated to a substantive interview, irrespective of whether that applicant is from a designated country. It is unavoidable that a Home Office caseworker will conduct an interview with a designated applicant in the knowledge that a certificate has been issued with regard to that country, and as a consequence be more resistant to the asylum claim. Indeed, if the designated list did not create presumption against the claim, there would be no point in having it.

If a caseworker is in any doubt about the circumstances prevailing in a designated country, he or she will naturally consult the Home Office's country assessment. In relation to Pakistan, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has spoken, the caseworker will find the observation:

"There is no evidence of Government-led persecution of minorities".

In contrast, the United States State Department commented in its 1995 report on Pakistan human rights practices:

"Discriminatory religious legislation has encouraged an atmosphere of religious intolerance which has led to acts of violence against Ahmadis, Christians, Hindus and Zikris."

I am pleased to see that, in the Home Office country assessment, applications for asylum from Ahmadis are given very careful scrutiny. Nevertheless, the Home Office assessment also states:

"Ahmadis are recognised as a religious group and rights are safeguarded under the constitution."

That is in totally contrast to the tone of the remarks of the retiring German ambassador to Pakistan, Mr. Alfred Vesting, who earlier this year wrote:

"Both the constitution and the penal code constitute the legal basis of the persecution of Ahmadis in Pakistan, who, should they wish to profess or to practise their faith, must live in constant fear. Since they have been officially dubbed as heretics, they are in their daily life exposed to every possible repression and assault against which they cannot or dare not defend. Thus, they are, so to say, outlawed."

According to the Home Office:

"There is no systematic or Government-led persecution of Christians in Pakistan".

Nevertheless—this matter has already been referred to by, among others, the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson)—section 295(c) of the penal code introduced by the Pakistani Government in 1986 stipulates the death penalty for blaspheming the prophet Mohammed, and that provision has been used against Christians. Perhaps the best known case is that of Salamat and Rehmat Masih, both of whom have now—significantly—been granted asylum in the west.

The Jubilee Campaign has produced extensive evidence of the continuing imprisonment of and widespread violence against Christians, their churches and their property—outrages often carried out with the connivance of the police and other authorities. I once again cite the US State Department report:

"Among religious minorities there is a well-founded belief that the authorities afford them less legal protection than they afford Muslim citizens."

Contrary to the Home Secretary's claim, there is ample proof of the systematic persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan, and, at the very least, this Government have failed to make a case for including Pakistan in the designated list.

11.25 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I hope that my croaking voice will last long enough to enable me to make one or two points, and that hon. Members will bear with me. I had not intended to speak, but the nonsense that I have heard from the Opposition has brought me to my feet.

One of the most serious immigration and asylum problems we face is the length of the queues for entry into this country. We agree that the shorter we can make those lists and the quicker we can make the process, the better it will be for everyone—not only the British citizens but those we are welcoming into the country under the immigration and asylum process.

It therefore seems eminently sensible that the Government should seek to determine whether there is any way in which it would be reasonable to speed up the entry procedure. They look and see that there are certain countries from which practically every application for asylum is turned down. We know the reasons for that, and it is in that direction that the Government look to speed up the system. They have done so by shortening and, to some extent, reducing the appeal procedure for applicants for asylum from those areas.

The Government have not abolished the appeal procedure, because there are still 10 days in which it can be used for appealing to the adjudicator, and judicial review is still available if there is a problem with the legality of any application. However, it seems eminently sensible that every reasonable effort should be made to shorten the queue in the area in which it will do least harm.

I quite agree with Opposition Members that the system must not prejudice an applicant's right to be properly considered. We have the assurance of the Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), and other Home Office Ministers that applications will not be prejudiced in any way. It is also obvious that an application from a listed country is not going to be limited in any sense prior to the point at which it is granted or refused. Applications will be fully considered, and every aspect of the arguments will be taken into account.

It does not seem to me to matter a jot whether there is or is not any presumption when an applicant comes from a suspect country, so long as the burden of proof does not change—and the burden of proof is not changing now.

While I was considering that point, I heard the preposterous argument—made in support of the Opposition's claim—that someone who was a friend and supporter of the Prime Minister of Pakistan's father should want to come here as an asylum seeker, running from the daughter.

It is the same party, and has the same traditions. I do not think that there are many people, if any, who, having supported the Bhutto regime and opposed the ul-Haq regime, run away from the Bhutto regime, would come to this country having run away from the daughter. If there is any such person, for any reason, I am satisfied that the grounds for his or her application will be properly and sensibly considered.

There was a long rant from the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). I do not share Opposition Members' view in this debate that the Government's intention is to screw down and make totally impossible genuine asylum applications from people from those seven countries.

I should have liked to hear Opposition Members—whether Liberal Democrat or Labour Members—tell us that they are genuinely trying to assist with our asylum procedures, to make them more effective and efficient. Not once did we hear any suggestion that they might have in the alternative on how to speed up the process. If the Opposition parties want to oppose the scheme that we are proposing for speeding up—as far as we reasonably can—the asylum process, it is incumbent on them to offer in return a practicable and acceptable alternative. Clearly they cannot do so, and their opposition must fail.

We are all agreed that decent and justifiable asylum seekers should have the right of asylum. In the name of all that is sensible in asylum policy in this country, we must join together and do what we can to make our system more efficient and effective. This is one such measure. Those who object to it only make themselves look stupid.

11.31 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): If a contradiction of what the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) has just said is necessary, we need only remind ourselves that, as we speak, preparations are under way in west London to open a tent city to provide temporary accommodation to asylum seekers—including many children—who are now so destitute that they have no means of survival. That fact has been brought to public attention, not only by reverses for the Government in the courts but by the speeches of the leaders of British Churches.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) have made it very clear that a central part of the Geneva convention was a requirement that all asylum cases should be considered on an individual basis. However much the Government protest, it is very clear that the central purpose of this order is to erect a presumption that all applicants from these seven countries have an unfounded claim.

I have read very carefully the country assessments produced by the Home Office. In all fairness, I can say only that I found them to be completely inadequate. In many respects, they were quite pathetic, and they gave every appearance of being cobbled together by very junior officials over a very short period. Almost daily during the passage of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, I called for these documents to be made available, and I was

[Mr. Max Madden]

always told that they were being prepared. I wonder why it took so long to produce so little—although I shall not dwell on that point.

I should like to consider India specifically, and some quotes about India from the United States State Department. In March 1996, the State Department stated:

"There continue to be serious human rights abuses, despite extensive constitutional and statutory safeguards . . . abuses include extrajudicial executions and other political killings, torture and excessive use of force by security forces and separatist militants . . . torture, rape and deaths of suspects in police custody are widespread throughout India."

In 1996, Amnesty International found:

"Thousands of political prisoners were held without charge or trial under special or preventative detention laws . . . At least 100 people died in police and military custody, many as a result of torture."

The torture of detainees was described as "endemic in every state".

Finally, I draw again to the attention of the House the position in the Punjab, where 3,000 people have been cremated as unidentified and unclaimed bodies. The activist who tried to expose this, Mr. Jaswant Singh Kalra, remains a disappeared person.

I remember vividly my visits to the Punjab since 1990, during which I have interviewed literally hundreds of Sikhs. They gave me detailed accounts of the human rights abuses that they and their families had suffered. They are mirrored in the reports to which I have referred.

Much play is made in the Home Office documents of elections in the Punjab and elections in Kashmir. I do not believe that those elections should be any comfort to hon. Members, because it is clear that, in the elections in Kashmir, there has been unacceptable coercion. The refusal of the Indian Government to invite international observers to monitor those elections remains a matter of considerable concern.

I was delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) made it clear that the next Labour Government would abolish the designated list—the white list—and would deal with all asylum claims properly and promptly. I remind the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) that the only way in which to do that is to ensure that proper staff and other resources are available, so that all asylum claims are dealt with fairly, justly and expeditiously.

I do not believe that the Home Office should rely on the poor-quality reports that we are considering tonight. I look forward to the next Labour Government establishing a human rights unit within the Foreign Office, which would advise the Government—

Mr. Kirkhope *rose—*

Mr. Madden: The unit would advise the Government on human rights issues around the world.

Mr. Kirkhope: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Madden: I strongly suggest that the House should establish a Select Committee on human rights, so that it can advise the next Labour Government on human rights issues.

The order is the latest disgraceful instalment of restrictive legislation of enacted by this Government to deter those who have well-founded claims for asylum from seeking haven in this country. It will be part of the political epitaph that will be hung round the neck of this miserable Government in the dying days of this Parliament. We all look forward to an end to this miserable approach to a very serious human rights issue. I hope that the order will be defeated tonight, that it will be thrown out with the other miserable legislation that the Government have introduced over the past 17 years.

11.38 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Is it not clear to the House this evening that the Government have been visited by their previous sins? When the Asylum and Immigration Bill was debated at its various stages, the Government claimed that there was a major problem with illegal immigration. Yet, on every occasion that they were challenged by Committee members from all parties, the Government were unable to produce any evidence or figures to justify that claim. Indeed, one of the reasons that they gave for involving employers in the tracking of illegal immigrants was that they were unable to make any estimation of the problem that they claimed existed.

The Government have said that they could meet their international obligations under the Geneva convention and the European convention on human rights. I do not understand—and I do not think that the British people will understand—how the Government can say that each case will be dealt with on its merits when there is one system for the seven countries named this evening, and another for asylum claimants from other parts of the world.

Are we to believe that immigration officers faced with two different systems will use the same presumptions in dealing with each case on its merits? I put it to the House that that is not the case, and immigration department officials have made that point to me. They know that there are other ways to improve efficiency and to get people through the system that do not involve this ridiculous procedure.

Do not the Government know that their proposals will not work? Mr. Justice Glidewell stated in his report that he did not believe that the proceedings for dealing with asylum cases would be speeded up, because he knows—as do most lawyers who deal with these matters—that further doubt in dealing with the cases will slow the system down. As the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) pointed out, people will inevitably seek judicial reviews to get justice and their rights, and that will clog up the system further.

The more one looks for legitimate motives, reason and logic in the 1996 Act and the order, the more one fails to find them. One must then remember what the Conservative candidate for Cambridgeshire South-West said when he was head of the research department—that the Act and the order had nothing to do with efficiency, and certainly nothing to do with fairness, but were examples of the Conservatives playing a race card that they think—I believe, erroneously—will assist them in the general election.

The Government could not justify the Bill or the Act, and I do not believe that they can justify the order. The same contradictions are apparent. As my hon. Friend the

Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said, the Foreign Secretary himself has acknowledged, in correspondence with the chairman of the Conservative party, that, together with other EU Foreign Secretaries, representations are being made to the Pakistan Government about their failure to uphold human rights for the Ahmadi community. If they cannot uphold human rights in their own country, why should we put them on a so-called "safe list"?

I do not believe that this order should be passed tonight, but if it is, it will not be long before this House, on a negative resolution, has to consider Nigeria, Algeria, Angola, Zaire and the other countries where the same level of rejections is apparent, as the Minister pointed out in relation to the seven countries this evening. I do not believe that this order has any support in this country. *The Economist* called the Bill "a nasty little Bill", and this is a nasty little order that should be thrown out this evening.

11.43 pm

Miss Widdecombe: There has not been a single speech from Opposition Members tonight that has not revealed a profound misunderstanding of these orders.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Minister give way?

Miss Widdecombe: Nor has there been any appreciation, or any attempt at appreciation, by the Opposition of the difference between acknowledging that there may be some violations of human rights and some dangers facing some people within a country and invalidating the general assessment of a country as largely safe.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Corbyn *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I—

Mr. Corbyn *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. It is clear that the Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Corbyn: I was not sure she had heard me.

Miss Widdecombe: I think the whole House heard the hon. Gentleman. There is, however, a difference between not being heard and simply being ignored, which is what happened to the hon. Gentleman.

Two sensible questions were asked in the debate, both by Conservative Members. My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) raised the question of compliance costs. The purpose of the order is not to add to costs but to reduce them, so the situation does not arise.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) asked me once again to make it clear that cases would be considered on their merits, and that the mere fact that a country was designated would not automatically mean that everybody applying from that country was refused.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) gave us a long treatise on the state of Pakistan. Then, in great triumph, he referred to a letter from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The hon. Gentleman is much attached to smoking letters and other things be believes to be of great importance. All that letter did was uphold our position. We have said that a country may be generally safe, but that does not mean that there are not pockets within it where there may be problems. Nor does it mean that people applying from that country will not be treated on their merits.

I turn next to the amazing contribution by the hon. and—I am told—learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). He made an amazing blunder. He gave us an exposition of international conventions, his main thesis being that, because we treat applicants from some countries differently from others, we are therefore discriminating and in breach of article 3 of the refugee convention. That article is about refugees, not seekers of asylum. He failed to make that basic distinction. The order applies to those seeking to be recognised as refugees; the convention applies to those recognised as refugees.

The hon. and learned Gentleman made a similar blunder when he referred to article 13 of the European convention on human rights. He said that it prohibited discrimination in matters covered by the convention. It does; but that convention does not confer a right to asylum. He thus made a complete mess of it from start to finish. I am glad that he is not my lawyer, if that is how he understands basic conventions.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) made a tremendous contribution, despite an obvious handicap tonight. He admirably summed up what we are seeking to do. We are seeking to speed up the process so that genuine applicants may be heard in good time, their cases may be properly considered, and they may find the haven that they require. Unfounded applications, however, should be dealt with as efficiently as possible.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14B(1).*

The House divided: Ayes 255, Noes 236.

Division No. 215] **[11.48 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*	Bendall, Vivian
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan	Beresford, Sir Paul
Alexander, Richard	Biffen, Rt Hon John
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*	Body, Sir Richard
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*	Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Amess, David	Booth, Hartley
Arbuthnot, James	Boswell, Tim
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Ashby, David	Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert	Bowis, John
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*	Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*	Brandreth, Gyles
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*	Brazier, Julian
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*	Bright, Sir Graham
Baldry, Tony	Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*	Brown, M *(Brigg & C'thorpes)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*	Browning, Mrs Angela
Bates, Michael	Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Batiste, Spencer	Burns, Simon
Bellingham, Henry	Burt, Alistair

Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'sth)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patchett, Terry
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexleyheath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Roger Knapman and
Mr. Richard Ottaway.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike

George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Eric Clarke.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Asylum (Designated Countries of Destination and Designated Safe Third Countries) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 14th October, be approved.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I turn now to motion No. 3, which contains a small error. The words, "That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House", were inadvertently omitted from the end of the motion as printed on today's Order Paper. Therefore, the motion will be moved in the form in which it was tabled yesterday. Copies are available in the Vote Office, should hon. Members wish to refer to them.

12.1 am

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I beg to move,

That further proceedings on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill shall be suspended until the next Session of Parliament.

That if a Bill is presented to this House in the next Session in the same terms as those in which the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill stood at the last stage of its proceeding in this House in this Session—

(a) the Bill shall be deemed to have been read the first, second and third time; and

(b) the Standing Orders and practice of the House applicable to the Bill, so far as complied with or (in the case of the Standing Orders relating to Private Business) dispensed with in this Session or in the Session 1994–95, shall be deemed to have been complied with or (as the case may be) dispensed with in the next Session;

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.

The principle of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill has been endorsed many times in the House. As hon. Members know, a great deal of work has been undertaken in this place in Standing Committee and in Select Committee under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant). It has also been subject to much scrutiny in another place. The purpose of the motion before the House today is simply to ensure that the Bill can be carried forward for further consideration in the next parliamentary Session and to ensure that the good work done here and in another place in improving the Bill since its introduction is not aborted.

12.2 am

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): The Opposition do not intend to delay either the House or the Bill tonight. We clearly support the motion that is before us and welcome the work that has been done on the Bill. We hope that, on its return, the Bill will move swiftly to a conclusion and receive Royal Assent. That will enable the work to be undertaken and completed as soon as possible—although, in view of the speed with which the Government have dealt with the Bill previously, I expect that a Labour Government will push it through to its conclusion.

12.3 am

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): As one of the 44 Members of Parliament who voted against the channel tunnel legislation on 5 June 1986 on the grounds that it would not pay and would be a dead loss, I think that the Government should listen to my views even at this late hour. Most of the other 44 hon. Members have either died or lost their seats in the intervening period.

My point is basic and simple: when the channel tunnel legislation was before the House, we were given the absolute assurance—it appeared in *Hansard* at the time—that, as it was a dramatic commercial prospect, there was no question of any Government subsidy or contribution in relation to rail projects. The Minister will recall that some hon. Members said, that even if the tunnel were busy for seven days a week and 24 hours a day and the trains were packed all the time, there was no way it would be commercially viable.

Unfortunately, because the channel tunnel has proved to be such an appalling disaster, banks at home and abroad have lost a great deal of money and there is not the slightest prospect of the project paying its way. I am concerned that, when the Bill was discussed on 25 April, some hon. Members who obviously know a great deal claimed that there would be a Government contribution of £1.4 billion and that some assets worth considerably more would be handed over to London and Continental very cheaply. Is it proper, given the latest channel tunnel reorganisation of finances, which involves write offs and great losses to banks, to let the motion pass through the House without the equivalent of a Third Reading discussion? Should we not take into account the new circumstances of the reorganisation of the finances of the channel tunnel?

The Government may say that the new circumstances do not matter, but clear and specific assurances were given by the Minister responsible that there would be no question of any subsidy for rail projects in Kent and elsewhere. As it appears from *Hansard* that there are such payments, would it not be possible for some assurance to be given that it is lawful for these contributions to be made, given the clear and specific assurances that were given when the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill was being discussed?

The Government may think that these considerations do not matter, but at the end of the day they surely must take into account that the great majority of the House voted for the Bill on the specific assurance that was given by Members, including Ministers, that the channel tunnel would be a remarkably successful financial project and that there was no question of Government finance, direct or indirect. It now seems, sadly, that Government finance will be involved.

12.6 am

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I welcome the Bill and wish to speed its passage through the House. However, I have two small points to put to the Minister. I am glad to see that the Secretary of State for Transport is sitting beside him. The Minister may recall that the right hon. Gentleman, when responding to me on 26 April, confirmed that the rail link would be able to carry piggy-back freight. I accept that he said that the main purpose of the rail link was to carry passengers, but he said that, by taking passenger services from existing rail lines, it would free up capacity in the existing network, which would be more suitably used by freight trains.

The Minister may recall that the Secretary of State made some play of the benefit to domestic passengers of reserving capacity on the rail link by virtue of eight domestic trains per hour in peak periods. It was claimed that the increase in overall capacity within the network would ease congestion in the network. The cost of the exercise has been reported to be £360 million in the form of a domestic capacity charge to preserve the eight train cars. That is in addition to £1.4 billion for the construction costs.

Is the Minister aware that Connex South-East, the train operating company that has inherited the relevant domestic paths, now says that it does not want them? It says that they are not economically viable because there are unlikely to be sufficient passengers wanting to use a local service through to St. Pancras. If that is the case—I hope that the Minister will say otherwise—the Government's arguments about freeing up capacity lie in shreds. The justification for public money advanced earlier by the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) falls by the wayside. It would appear that putting forward £1.4 billion of public money for the construction costs plus £360 for the domestic service grant is basically flawed.

Unless domestic services are directed on to the rail link, how will capacity be found for freight train services from Europe on to what is admitted is an already congested existing network?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but this debate must be fairly narrow because it relates to a carry-over procedure. If the hon. Gentleman is arguing that he is advancing reasons why there should not be a carry-over, well and good. It seemed, however, that he was developing a general theme.

Mr. Chidgey: I think that I have made my point, Madam Deputy Speaker.

12.8 am

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Perhaps I might make my point, Madam Deputy Speaker. I say in answer to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) that my constituents now take 50 minutes in commuting to London. The rail link will allow them from the Ebbsfleet international station to commute in only 19 minutes. I can assure him that there are thousands of people who would use the service.

My constituents view the Bill with mixed feelings, because they have suffered considerable blight since the project first appeared in 1988. The channel tunnel rail link will cause considerable environmental damage to my constituents in north-west Kent. However, the international station that is proposed for Ebbsfleet will be a catalyst for massive economic regeneration, and for that reason we would like to see an early decision on the Bill and want its enactment to take place during the next few weeks or months.

There are, however, outstanding issues that should be properly addressed, the principal one being Ashenbank woods—a major piece of ancient woodland in my constituency. If the current proposals, which have been considered in the House, by the Select Committee and in the other place, were to go through, they would have a major impact on the environmental record of the rail link, because geological studies have shown that the ground beneath that wood is made up of loose gravel and lignite, which would require the rail link to have a very wide cutting indeed, and that by definition means the devastation of the woodland.

Strong representations have been made to both Select Committees by Cobham parish council, the Woodland Trust and other environmental organisations. The Select Committee in the other place paid particular attention to the environment and in its interim report said:

"We recommend that the promoters start with the assumption that retained wall cuttings in Ashenbank Wood are the best option."

The promoter, Union Railways, has replied to the House of Lords Select Committee—I quote from its commentary on the preliminary decisions:

"The Promoters note that the Select Committee does not require construction of a tunnel beneath Ashenbank Wood. The Promoters undertake to require the nominated undertaker to look further at the potential benefits of some ground retaining measures in reducing the amount of land-take to the wood. The conclusions of the studies to date, which Gravesham Borough Council, English Nature, English Heritage, the Countryside Commission, and Kent County Council have accepted, is that another solution, a package of mitigatory and compensatory measures . . . is more promising."

That response is somewhat disingenuous. It refers to some ground-retaining measures and does not refer—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but I think that the hon. Gentleman is pursuing somewhat the same path as the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey). The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) has had his little fling. He must now come back to the point.

Mr. Arnold: My point is that I hope that the House of Lords Select Committee will stick to its guns and to the decision that it has taken on behalf of the environment and for my constituents.

I have another brief point to make. The Minister of State is present. I ask him to accelerate the interdepartmental review of blight. Both Select Committees have expressed great sympathy for my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Winzar and Mrs. Smith, who have been very severely hit by the blight impact of this proposal. We want action, not words. I hope that my hon. Friend will do his utmost to speed up the process of the interdepartmental review.

12.12 am

Mr. Watts: With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) asked whether the Bill involved any subsidy to the channel tunnel. It is important that we distinguish between the tunnel and the rail link project. The Bill does not provide any subsidy to the channel tunnel itself in the ownership of Eurotunnel. It does provide some element of Government support towards the private finance initiative project as a whole, and that is in recognition of the benefits both to domestic and international travellers from the provision of this high-speed link.

That leads me to the point made by the hon. Member for—

Sir Teddy Taylor: Does my hon. Friend not accept that, at column 1187 of the *Official Report* on 5 June 1986, a specific question was asked about rail links, and a clear, specific assurance was given that there was no question of any Government cash being used for rail links?

Mr. Watts: My recollection of the statutory position is that subsidy to the channel tunnel is prohibited, but if my hon. Friend will allow me I shall write to him with a more detailed answer than I can give him off the cuff tonight.

[Mr. Watts]

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) asked about the domestic capacity. We have secured eight peak hour train paths and, as those will reduce journey times for Kent commuters by 30 minutes, it is inconceivable that they will not prove to be popular services.

As to who operates those services, the franchising director has said that the existing franchisee will have the opportunity to bid to operate them. But if the operator chose not to do so, the franchising director would offer them to other operators. I would be amazed if there was not intense competition for the right to run such premium services.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the rail link has to be capable of carrying freight, although it will be for the operator to decide whether he wishes to accept freight on the link. It is being built to a larger loading gauge than the rest of our network, so it should be capable of piggy-back.

As to the existing lines which will have capacity released, obviously a detailed engineering study would be required to identify whether modifications were needed for piggy-back traffic. However, as there is an active proposal for piggy-back services to start operation, I suspect that any such work will have been undertaken long before the rail link is up and running.

We are aware, because my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) has brought it to our attention so many times, of the importance of the proper treatment of Ashenbank woods. As my hon. Friend said, the Select Committee in another place expressed a strong preference for the design to start from a presumption of retained cuttings, and appropriate undertakings have been given by the promoters. As to whether I am right in believing that the undertakings are adequate for the purposes of the Select Committee in another place, I would rather wait to see the Select Committee's special report which is to be published tomorrow. If they are not, doubtless the Select Committee will say so and there will then be the opportunity to take the matter further during the Report stage in another place and consideration in the Commons of Lords amendments.

When the departmental review of blight was announced by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, he said in Standing Committee that we would expect an interim report from the working party in the autumn. As far as I am aware, that is still on course to be delivered. However, I understand the urgency that my hon. Friend and other right hon. and hon. Friends have pressed upon me in the past and we shall seek to deliver that as rapidly as we can.

With those few remarks I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That further proceedings on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill shall be suspended until the next Session of Parliament.

That if a Bill is presented to this House in the next Session in the same terms as those in which the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill stood at the last stage of its proceeding in this House in this Session—

(a) the Bill shall be deemed to have been read the first, second and third time; and

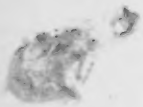
(b) the Standing Orders and practice of the House applicable to the Bill, so far as complied with or (in the case of the Standing Orders relating to Private Business) dispensed with in this Session or in the Session 1994–95, shall be deemed to have been complied with or (as the case may be) dispensed with in the next Session;

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That this House do meet on Thursday 17th October at half-past Nine o'clock.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*



Fishing (South-East)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

12.17 am

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): It is a privilege for me to speak tonight on behalf of the Essex fishermen and, in particular, 50 Essex fishing boats.

The boats operate essentially as a non-sector organisation and that results in some disadvantages compared with the generally more powerful producer organisations which operate from Britain's major fishing ports. The south-east has a strong fishing tradition and is now essentially a sole fishery, but other species are available and are fished from time to time. As the boats are non-sector, the fishermen receive their monthly quotas direct from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and therefore cannot develop any overall catch marketing strategy.

Another key disadvantage concerns decommissioning. Producer organisations retain their track record following decommissioning. But if a non-sector, south-east boat is decommissioned, its track record is submerged into the whole of the United Kingdom fleet. As things currently stand, the south-east would therefore lose that track record.

I turn to the topical question of the common fisheries policy, which was agreed in 1982. Its laudable key objectives were, first, to meet and protect the needs of coastal communities, fishermen and fisheries-related industries and, secondly, to protect and conserve sea fish stocks. Since the CFP's introduction, fishermen and fish-related industries of the south-east have been badly let down. The CFP is simply not working in their favour, and they feel betrayed by it.

As for conservation, fish stocks continue to be greatly threatened and damaged. Some have been effectively wiped out. One example is that North sea plaice have been devastated, removing one of the opportunities for south-east fishermen. Quota hoppers take 44 per cent. of plaice, which the 1982 agreement had clearly earmarked for the British industry. So there we have it—irrefutable evidence that the CFP is not meeting its key objectives. In a nutshell, most of the damage has been caused to fish stocks by foreign fishing operations.

Non-sector fishermen were delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister visited Leigh and Castle Point to listen carefully to their concerns. I am therefore delighted that he has found time in his busy schedule to reply to this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess), who has done so much behind the scenes to help Essex fishermen, my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) and I met the Minister with local fishermen. The fishermen demanded action to resolve the problem of quota hopping. We see in today's news that the Minister is taking just that action. I congratulate him on his firm and just stand to reverse the law with a protocol in the revised Maastricht treaty.

Under Government proposals, it should be possible to limit the allocation of quotas to fishing boats that are owned by businesses operating in the United Kingdom, that have a crew made up of UK residents and that land a proportion of their catch into the UK for the benefit of the UK processing industry. Those measures would effectively end quota hopping—and not a moment too soon.

Twenty-two per cent. of total UK tonnage of our offshore fleet is owned and operated by foreign interests. I know how much distress that causes to my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), who has been such a stalwart fighter on behalf of his fishermen. The European Court of Justice has enfranchised the quota hoppers, and that cannot be right, as it was never the intention of the 1982 agreement that the British quota should be taken by foreign vessels. We should think carefully before sticking doggedly to an agreement that clearly fails to be in the interests of the people of the UK. One thing I do know: we have an excellent champion in my hon. Friend the Minister, and we congratulate him on tackling quota hopping and on meeting and listening carefully to our local fishermen.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and I ask the Government to go further if possible. We ask them, first, to improve quota management arrangements for the non-sector industry and, secondly, to secure exemption from quota for very small, traditionally built fishing boats. I know that the Minister may have in mind a figure of about 8 m. My local fishermen would prefer the exemption to apply to any boat below 10 m. There is a debate there and no doubt the Minister will listen carefully to what we say. Thirdly, I ask the Government to consider ways in which to enable a non-sector area to retain its track record after decommissioning, as the producer organisations currently do.

Perhaps more specifically for Leigh and Canvey, we ask the Minister to limit licences so that specific south-east fishing specialisations such as the cockle fishing industry can be protected, and to ensure that the European Union, in redistributing our own money to us under the PESCA fund, does so fairly for the benefit of Southend and Canvey. The PESCA fund gives help to communities affected by the decline of fishing industries. I understand that about £400,000 has been made available: it has been set aside for competitive bids between the Southend and King's Lynn travel-to-work areas. The fund should be used to provide the necessary hygiene, ice-making and fish-handling equipment and infrastructure at the point of landing, not only in Leigh and on Two Tree island, but on Canvey island.

Some 250 families in our area are dependent on the fishing industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and I are doing all that we can to assist those families; we know that their jobs are badly threatened by the current situation. We also know that my hon. Friend the Minister is fighting on their behalf. The families are a small, but worthy, honourable and loyal community. They are led by good people such as Mr. Godbold and Dave Spurgeon of the Little Haven Fishermen's Association. They deserve a better deal than that currently afforded them by the common fisheries policy. They are shrewd people. They know that Labour's shallow sham of a European policy would fail them miserably, on fishing as elsewhere.

The Labour party leader said that he would never be isolated in Europe, but our fishermen demand just that: they want isolation from the European vessels, particularly from the quota hoppers. Labour's European policy would finish off our fishing industry. A Labour Government would surrender to their European socialist brothers. They would run up the white flag on every one of our fishing boats. They

[Dr. Robert Spink]

would have plenty of white flags to use after they had broken up the United Kingdom and destroyed the Union Jack. The white flag would be the new Labour Union Jack. But it should not come to that.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has introduced party politics, because he knows that many of the measures that he has been advocating tonight have been supported by the Opposition. That is particularly true of the calls for greater control over our own waters and giving inshore boats—which often fish in selective, environmentally friendly ways—some positive help in terms of quota allocation. Whether the hon. Gentleman likes it or not, many of the reforms can be brought about only through the European Union and the Commission. The way to do that is to argue constructively, seek allies and advance progressively—not to stand on the sidelines without participating in the debate.

Dr. Spink: As we would all expect, the hon. Gentleman comes forward with warm words. But my constituents, particularly my fishermen, all know that the Labour party's instincts are to surrender everything to a federal Europe, not to protect and defend Great Britain—the Conservative party's instincts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and I support my hon. Friend the Minister in seeking tough reforms of the CFP. The Government's policy of reform is absolutely correct and they are to be congratulated on it. But if progress with Europe is not made to the advantage of our fishing communities, we cannot stand by and let them sink—we cannot desert them. We may ultimately have to consider the example of the Norwegians who, outside the CFP, have a workable system based on national control within their own 200-mile limit. We could then apply our own conservation regime and control all vessels that fish our waters. That would require a special derogation from the free movement provisions of the treaty of Rome—notably article 52—at the current intergovernmental conference. I am delighted that that is high on the Government's list of priorities.

We all know that there is a serious question mark over the quality and stringency of control of some fishing boats. There is simply no effective catch data verification or control by some member nations. That cannot be allowed to continue.

The CFP rules are becoming more and more complex and are effectively criminalising an honourable group of British workers. That cannot be allowed to continue. We could maintain sensible co-operation with Europe, but a policy of equal access may simply prove unworkable. Europe itself is not working. What could be more senseless than paying huge subsidies to produce and store food, then destroy it, or to risk life to catch good fish, only to throw it overboard, polluting our seas? We need strong Conservative leadership and common sense that puts Britain first—the sort of leadership that my hon. Friends the Minister and the Members for South Hams and for Basildon have given on this fishing issue.

On 20 August, the excellent *Canvey Island Times* reported my hon. Friend the Minister's visit to our town. It stated:

"Leigh and Canvey fishermen said they were pleased with their meeting with the Minister".

They told me so as well. They trust the Minister. They trust the Government to defend their interests. They trust our instincts. Their trust is well placed.

12.29 am

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) on allowing us the opportunity to debate these important matters. There is little doubt that he has been a champion of the local fishing industry. On 27 March I had the opportunity to raise this subject in another Adjournment debate. As a result, my hon. Friend the Minister agreed to attend what has been proved to be an historic meeting, which took place in July at Beambridge yacht club. My right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon), my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point and I were present, together with my hon. Friend the Minister.

My hon. Friend the Minister met a whole number of people and many famous families whose livelihoods depend on the cockle industry and on fishing generally. He learnt at first hand just how important fishing is to our particular part of Essex. Many of those fishermen have done much for this country, especially during the second world war.

It was a delight to myself and other colleagues that my hon. Friend the Minister attended the meeting bearing gifts. He listened very carefully to what the representatives had to say, and I believe that on every count he met their wishes. There is just one outstanding subject. He will recall looking at the Thames estuary and listening carefully to the points about the need for some extra funding for dredging the estuary. I wonder whether he has had time to consider that further.

Obviously, Conservative Members are very concerned about proposals to reduce the United Kingdom catch. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point was entirely right in what he said about the Labour party's stance on this issue. There is great duplicity on the subject. I very much hope that at the November meeting Britain will hold its ground and give no truck to the bureaucratic nightmare of a regional fishing policy, as advocated by the Liberal Democrats. The proposals would mean a veritable jungle of committees and bureaucracy, overseen by Brussels, with Britain allowed no say in the running of our industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point and I hope to visit Europe before Christmas to meet the Fisheries Commissioner.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): It is a waste of time.

Mr. Amess: I do not accept that. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point and myself intend to meet the lady, and we shall do our very best to put the case firmly. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for what he has done so far and for what he will do in future.

12.33 am

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) for allowing me to make a few chosen comments in this

excellent Adjournment debate. I congratulate him on the quality of his speech, and, of course, my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon on his excellent contribution, which we have come to expect from him. I speak from experience of the second largest fishing port in England and Wales, which is in Brixham in my constituency and, fortunately, shares well in the £500 million-worth of fish landed in this country each year.

Unfortunately, whether in the south-east or the south-west, millions of pounds are lost through quota hoppers. Of the UK's 20,000 fishermen, 4,000 are Dutch and Spanish. That may seem double Dutch—it is certainly hard to understand. It is by far the single most important issue for UK fishermen—it remains central to the common fisheries policy for all fishermen, whether they come from the south-east or the south-west. Quotas were given to individual countries by the European Union and were never intended to be tradeable commodities.

The UK fishing industry leads the way with technical conservation methods and in general has a good record of compliance with EU regulations, but every time Spanish fishermen are caught breaking the rules by trawling with the wrong net size or landing undersized fish while flying the red ensign, it is the British fishermen's reputation that is tarnished.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister of State and the Minister for Agriculture for their unstinting commitment to resolving the quota-hopping problem once and for all. I thank the Minister of State personally for coming to my constituency several times—he is always most welcome.

If Commissioner Bonino is not minded to help, we shall have to refuse to renew the common fisheries policy when it expires in the year 2002. Will the Minister say whether it is correct that if the fisheries policy is not renegotiated and in place by 2002, the position reverts to what it was pre-1973? Other countries are pinching nearly half of our fish quota. If the European Courts mean anything, they must ensure that justice is done and that our quota is handed back to us—and handed back fast.

12.35 am

Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry): I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) decided to focus attention on the concerns of the fishing industry in the south-east, because it gives me the opportunity to report to the House on the talks and meetings that I have had with fishermen from the area in recent months. If, in the time available, I cannot respond in detail to the various points raised by him and my hon. Friends the Members for Basildon (Mr. Amess) and for South Hams (Mr. Steen), I shall of course write to them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon was successful in securing a debate in March in which he set out the problems facing Essex and Thames estuary fishermen in particular. In that debate, he invited me to visit Leigh-on-Sea. I am pleased that I was able to take up his kind offer. In July I was pleased to meet my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) and my hon. Friends the Members for Basildon and for Castle Point. I was also able to combine that visit with a long-standing invitation to meet the inshore fishermen of Aldeburgh.

I found both visits extremely valuable, as they enabled me to have an additional insight into the operation of the non-sector fleets. I shall explain to the House in more detail what I mean by non-sector fleets and the problems that local fishermen have to face. Of course, I am determined to continue to meet fishermen from around the country. Indeed, in the coming months I shall have further talks with fishermen at ports as far apart as Harwich and Rye.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point will know, and as I have made clear many times, my only concern is to secure the best possible deal for UK fishermen. That should be apparent from the outcome of yesterday's Fisheries Council in Luxembourg. A great deal of time was spent discussing technical conservation measures and the Commission's proposals for further reducing the size of our fleet. I made it clear that I could only accept conservation measures that were sensible and realistic and would command the respect of the UK fishermen. I also left fellow Fisheries Ministers in no doubt that I could not accept any further compulsory reduction in our fleet unless and until there was satisfactory progress on the issue of quota hoppers.

We have tabled our proposals before the intergovernmental conference and, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister emphasised to other Heads of Government recently in Dublin, the national quota system in the common fisheries policy is designed to balance the need for fish conservation with a secure benefit for a member state's fishing community. There is a burning sense of injustice in Britain not only among fishermen but among people in general that the system of national quotas is being systematically undermined. We are determined to put that right.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams said, it is crazy that nearly a fifth of the quota designated for UK fishermen is being taken by foreign owners of foreign vessels that are foreign crewed and foreign skippered. It is a crazy situation, and it cannot be allowed to continue. Even more crazy—as my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams said—is that those vessels are purportedly flying our flag, masquerading as UK fishermen when they are anything but UK fishermen. They are not even landing their catch in the UK, and bring no economic benefit to us whatsoever.

I think that all hon. Members agree that the common fisheries policy is far from perfect. As the House knows, however, the answer is not to run away from it but to work for improvement to make the policy effective and fair. I am determined to do that. Fish are a common resource that do not respect national boundaries. We conserve that resource by working together within a common framework.

We are determined to maintain the restrictions on fishing within our six and 12-mile limits. Those restrictions are effective and fully supported by the UK industry. Under the CFP, only UK vessels can fish within six miles of our shore, and that includes most of the inshore fishing industry in the south-east.

There are also restrictions on access by foreign vessels within our six to 12-mile limits, so that, off

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

Essex for example, only French and Belgian vessels—because of historic rights to access—can fish within those limits alongside our own fishermen. We are fully committed to maintaining the restrictions on access by foreign vessels within our six and 12-mile limits.

I am conscious that fishermen in Essex and the south-east are facing a difficult and challenging future. I am also aware that there is continuing unease about the way in which our quota management arrangements work. As I made clear to the House last March, we have sought to operate arrangements that are fair and equitable and to encourage fishermen, through producers' organisations, to take on daily responsibility for the management of quota allocations.

Over the past eight years, many fishermen have opted to join or form producers' organisations. There are now 19 such organisations, and together they account for more than 90 per cent. of the uptake of our quotas. They also represent some 60 per cent. of our over 10 m fleet, and a much bigger proportion of those vessels that actively target quota stocks.

At the same time, I realise and fully appreciate that the majority of fishermen from the south-east are not covered by the network of producers' organisations—that they are non-sector fishermen. When I visited Leigh-on-Sea in July, some fishermen expressed considerable interest in setting up a producers' organisation to manage quota allocations and to market fish caught by Thames estuary fishermen. I welcome that, and I am pleased to learn that initial approaches by local fishermen in Essex who want to form a producers' organisation have been made to the Ministry. I can assure the House that we shall do everything we can within the framework of the European Community's marketing regulations to advise those fishermen and to assist that initiative.

I must also emphasise that we have taken important steps over the years, and that we will continue to do so, to safeguard the position of those who continue to operate as non-sector fishermen. First, monthly catch limits are set in consultation with representatives of non-sector fishermen, and every human effort is made to keep fisheries open throughout the year.

Secondly, producers' organisations that want to manage quota allocations must do so for all fish stocks. That means that, in managing the non-sector allocations, the fisheries department is able to focus exclusively on the interests of fishermen who are not members of producers' organisations. Officials in my Department are continually seeking to protect the interests of non-sector fishermen, and to ensure that those interests are looked after fairly.

Thirdly, we have introduced underpinning for stocks of particular interest to non-sector fishermen, including North sea sole and cod. Those arrangements have operated for the past two years, and this year, for example, they have resulted in non-sector fishermen receiving an extra 691 tonnes of cod, which is equivalent to 38 per cent. of their allocation.

From my discussion with fishermen, there was a clear desire that the arrangements for underpinning should be extended to other fish stocks. The quota management arrangements for 1997 are due to be discussed in Edinburgh at the beginning of November with representatives of all sides of the industry. I intend to propose that underpinning should be extended to North sea whiting and plaice, which are the remaining two quota stocks of particular interest to Thames estuary fishermen.

Underpinning also operates for the under 10 m fleet. For the past three years, those fishermen have received a guaranteed share of the UK's quota irrespective of whether they have been able to catch their full entitlement. There may, for example, have been bad weather or fish stocks may have failed to turn up on inshore grounds.

To further safeguard the interests of the inshore fleet, we amended our licensing rules earlier this year to check the future growth in the number of powerful vessels just under the 10 m limit. I am also pleased to report that, so far this year, it has not been necessary to close any fishery to the small inshore fleet, including the North sea sole fishery. I hope that I have demonstrated that within the tight quota constraints set by the Community and the need to take effective measures to conserve fish stocks, the interests of south-east fishermen are not being overlooked. I am determined to ensure that they are treated fairly.

May I reassure my hon. Friend that the track records of decommissioned vessels in the membership of producer organisations are not, in fact, retained by the POs. The track records of all decommissioned vessels, irrespective of the group to which they belong, are shared among the remainder of the fishing fleet. Thus when a PO vessel is decommissioned, the non-sector is able to benefit from its track record. Indeed, I am told that, over the years, this arrangement has generally favoured the non-sector because it has obtained a share of the usually larger track records of decommissioned PO boats.

In our consultations on the present decommissioning scheme, we invited comments on the proposal that fishermen should be allowed to retain the track record from decommissioned vessels, with a percentage of those track records being set aside for the non-sector. I have to say that, alas, the consultation exercise revealed little support for this proposal from fishermen in the south-east or from any part of the industry, including the non-sector, with the result that it was not included in the final scheme. However, as I made clear at Leigh-on-Sea, I am always ready to listen to further representations. I appreciate the frustrations of the non-sector and of Essex and south-east fishermen in particular. If we have any future decommissioning round and if the fishermen wish to put forward further proposals, I shall be very happy to consider them.

I fully appreciate the importance of the sole fishery to fishermen within the Thames estuary. Last year, sole accounted for just under one third of the value of the total fish landed into Essex ports. The remainder of their earnings comes from other stocks such as cod, bass, plaice, sprats, skate and rays. Such diversification

is essential; fishermen must avoid becoming over-dependent on a single stock.

My hon. Friend referred to the possibility of exempting inshore fishermen from the constraints of quota management. Within the present discussions in the Community on the next round of decommissioning, there is much talk about exempting coastal fishing boats—some Fisheries Ministers yesterday gave figures as high as 14 m—from the constraints of quota management. That will have to be discussed within the whole context of future fisheries management.

I fully understand the frustrations of, for example, Aldeburgh fishermen. Although they are fishing just off the Suffolk coast and can go out only when the weather conditions are fine, they are caught up in the same quota management conditions as large North sea trawlers are.

In respect of my hon. Friend's concern about financial assistance, I am pleased to tell the House that £400,000—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 16 October 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BSE (Northern Ireland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Anthony Coombs.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to debate this issue, which is much appreciated by the farming community in Northern Ireland, and, indeed, by the greater rural communities on which it depends.

The bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis broke out last March, and led to the ban on the export of United Kingdom beef. It was clear that the impact would be greater on Northern Ireland than on Great Britain, because 80 per cent. of Northern Ireland's beef product is exported, compared with some 20 per cent. of British beef. That means that by far the greatest proportion of the Northern Ireland farming industry's beef product has now lost almost its entire market. The collapse of the beef export market has left the farming community in Northern Ireland in great financial crisis.

The House should appreciate that the farming industry is the basic industry in Northern Ireland, not only for farmers and their families, but for the many rural communities that survive on the economics of the surrounding farming fraternity. It would not be an exaggeration to describe the impact of the crisis on the dependent rural communities as the single greatest tragedy since the great famine in Ireland 150 years ago. Although this crisis will never, thank God, reach the horrific proportions of that period, it is, none the less, a most devastating blow. The farming community sees it as the greatest single setback of the past 150 years.

As I said, agriculture is central to the economy of Northern Ireland—in fact, the beef industry is worth £1 million a day to the local economy. The unfairness of the impact on Northern Ireland was the first major reaction among farmers and their representatives. It should be noted that the incidence of BSE in Northern Ireland was only one tenth of the incidence in Great Britain, and the outbreak was largely confined to the dairy herds in Northern Ireland. Moreover, Northern Ireland had a much more efficient system for containing the outbreak and assuring the quality of Northern Ireland beef, through the farm quality assurance scheme.

Northern Ireland has a sophisticated computerised system that ensures the traceability of every animal in the cattle herd—I repeat, the traceability of every animal in the cattle herd. That reduces the possibility of infected animals entering the food chain to practically zero—the possibility is almost eliminated. On Monday, the Minister of Agriculture acknowledged that Northern Ireland had a significantly lower incidence of BSE than other parts of the United Kingdom, and that it had that almost 100 per cent. effective traceability scheme. Both those factors should facilitate easier access to a certified herd scheme, should one come about.

The first response of the farming community and its organisations, which received unanimous cross-party support from Northern Ireland's Members of Parliament and Members of the European Parliament, was to ask for separate status for Northern Ireland, so that it could escape the total ban on the export of UK beef. Commissioner Fischler has indicated then and now that the European Commission would look sympathetically on such a proposition, not only for Northern Ireland but for other parts of the United Kingdom, such as Scotland and other regions, that have that lower incidence of BSE and greater traceability of animals.

The stumbling block, however, is that a request for such status must be made by the sovereign Government of the United Kingdom, and the Government have adamantly turned their face against such a proposition. I hope that the arguments that we may hear this morning will enable a change in attitude and policy, or that the arguments will cause some other change that will enable the general idea of separate status to be implemented.

It was also interesting to note that when, last Monday, the President of the European Council of Agriculture Ministers—Mr. Yates, TD—met representatives of the farming industry and politicians in Northern Ireland, he offered strong support for the removal of the EU ban on the export of Northern Ireland beef. Therefore, the presiding Agriculture Minister of the EU and Commissioner Fischler have both indicated their support—if only the Government would make a request.

The Government's initial response to the crisis, with the agreement of the EU, was a cull of animals older than 30 months, on the basis that cattle younger than 30 months were less at risk because of the disease's development time. The cull began at the beginning of May. Initially, the prices paid were reasonable, and cattle began to move off the farms.

In Northern Ireland, the scheme was administered by the Northern Ireland Meat Exporters Association, which represents all the major beef plants, in a co-ordinated effort to ensure that all farmers received equal treatment. Farmers were invited to inform the association of the likely number of animals they would submit for the cull.

The theory was that a percentage of each farmer's animals would be taken away on a rotational basis, depending on the capacity of slaughterhouses and rendering plants, until the cull was complete. There have, however, been quite a number of problems in ensuring the smooth operation of the scheme. The scheme lost much credibility, and elements of unfairness and privilege have crept into it.

There is a huge backlog of animals waiting to go through the system. Since last May, 160,000 animals were booked to go through the cull, and about 80,000 have gone through it—30,000 culled cows and 50,000 "clean" cattle. There is an estimated backlog of 45,000 cows, and another 30,000 "clean" cattle require culling.

I think that it would be accepted in most quarters in Northern Ireland that there has been substantial overbooking, so that the backlog is possibly less than

[Mr. Eddie McGrady]

100,000. The Department of Agriculture in Northern Ireland estimates that the backlog is approximately 50,000 cows, but we think that that is probably a conservative estimate. Each week, about 2,000 new animals—mainly older cows—are becoming eligible under the terms of the scheme. Clearly, therefore, with the current maximum rendering capacity of 4,000 animals per week and a net clearance from the backlog of only 2,000 animals per week, it will take a considerable time to clear the backlog.

I understand that new measures have been implemented recently to speed up the disposal of cattle over the age of 30 months, with changes in rendering and the storage of carcases. I hope that the situation will be improved, as it is still not acceptable.

There must be greater co-ordination between the Northern Ireland Meat Exporters Association and the meat plants. Farmers allege that animals have been booked for a long time and that none have been taken. Farmers are entering the most difficult period of their financial year, as the summer feed has finished this month, and cattle will now go into indoor feeding. The backlog of cattle is still on the farms, and some farmers are receiving no income whatsoever. If they cannot buy new feed, many of them will suffer financial disaster.

It is expected that two things will happen. First, some farmers, and quite a few small farmers—of which Northern Ireland has a great proportion—will go to the wall financially. That will affect not only farmers and their families but the communities in which they have lived perhaps for the past 200 years. It is a significant financial and deep psychological problem for Northern Ireland's farming communities.

Secondly, if the cull throughput is not accelerated, there is the prospect that animals will have to be killed and burned in the fields of Northern Ireland. I am sure that no hon. Member wants to see that happen to the rural communities of Northern Ireland.

Rendering plants have been working at full capacity from May to September. We have very few rendering plants, and the Lisburn plant will be closed down for refurbishing for a couple of weeks. Furthermore, the plant at Duncrue, in Belfast, was totally out of action last week, which has increased the backlog.

We need additional cold storage capacity, which might ease the problem. There are, however, some technical difficulties with storage. I am sure that the House would not be particularly interested in the details of the difficulties of freezing whole animals, and I am not able to give it those details. The shortage of cold storage, however, is one of the great difficulties that we are facing.

Over the next few weeks, additional rendering capacity could be made available elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The animals would have to be transported live—on the hoof—which would impose a burden of additional costs on an already impoverished farming community. The Government should commission additional freezer units, either static or mobile, as quickly as possible to store intervention stocks, thereby enabling the cull to proceed much quicker.

Beef producers in the United Kingdom are to receive additional support worth £29 million, as part of a £45 million package of extra aid that was announced by the UK Agriculture Minister, and £16.6 million will be spent on extra cold storage capacity to speed up the cull of animals over 30 months. The farming unions and communities of Northern Ireland and I welcome that support.

However, farmers have been quick to point out—as they always are in financial matters—that those additional funds are probably less than the amount that they will lose, because of the forthcoming 10 per cent. cut in compensation payments for animals over 30 months. It appears—I should like to hear the Minister's comments on this—that nothing will be gained from this so-called "extra money".

Farmers are suffering a severe loss in cull prices, and the problem will become even more acute this week. Farmers have been receiving £1.50 per kilo for steers and heifers at deadweight and £1.66 per kilo for cows, whereas market prices before the crisis were about £2.20 to £2.30 per kilo.

There had been a supplement of 25p per kilo live weight on steers and heifers, but Treasury pressure ensured that that was reduced by 80 per cent. to 5p, which is again a substantial clawback. Now that compensation rates have been reduced further, it is expected that the value of animals will go down yet again by another £50 or £60. As I understand it, that is due to take effect from 21 October. I urge that, at the very least, the supplement that has been cut be restored, and, in addition, that compensation rates be increased all around.

It will be noted that the European Commission made available 112 million ecu, which has been used to provide a top-up for the beef special premium at £17.40 per head and a top-up of £23.13 per head for the suckler cow premium and for a payment of £60 per head for all animals sold for slaughter between 20 March and 30 June. However, the Government were given the authority by the Commission—I hesitate to express it that way, as I know that the UK does not need that authority—to produce matching funding. That was the intention, but they have failed to do so. Should the Government match the Commission's funding, it would enable the top-ups for the beef special premium and the special cow premium at least to be doubled, thereby alleviating much of the financial hardship now being endured by farmers in Northern Ireland.

I note that Baroness Denton announced last Friday that beef producers in Northern Ireland would receive an advance of 80 rather than 60 per cent. of the full rate of payment under the 1996 beef special premium and suckler cow premium schemes. I understand that that will come into effect on 1 November. It is to be welcomed, because it will alleviate part of the current cash flow crisis being experienced by farmers in Northern Ireland. However, never being satisfied, may I suggest that the 80 per cent. could be increased to 100 per cent., to allow farmers to survive the great difficulties of the next few months?

Suckler cow farmers are facing a very difficult period. Most of them depend almost exclusively on the income received from sales of their calves at the autumn sales. Because of the uncertainty in the beef industry, there is a great fear that prices will plunge disastrously. The most effective short-term help for suckler cow farmers is through the hill livestock compensatory allowance.

A few years ago, the HLCA, as it is known, was reduced for two successive years, and subsequently frozen for two successive years. In effect, it thus fell for four

successive years. I note that the Government agreed on 18 September last to make £60 million available to cattle producers in the less-favoured areas under the 1997 HLCA. Of that amount, we think that £14 million will be available to Northern Ireland, which is to be welcomed.

As I understand it, the difficulty is that the precise rates for the 1997 scheme will not be set until after the autumn review of economic conditions in the hills and uplands. In view of the unprecedented crisis in the beef industry, there is now a compelling argument for a substantial increase in HLCA payments to help tide suckler cow farmers over their present difficulties. I hope that the autumn review produces sensible, practical and, of course, increased rates of aid for the 1997 scheme. There should also be a compensatory payment on calves sold this autumn to compensate for the anticipated heavy market losses, if they are incurred.

In the medium and long term, the best way to steady prices at the autumn sales and to stabilise the beef industry generally is through the intervention system. I urge that a guarantee be given that all future Northern Ireland tenders for intervention will be awarded in full, that a fixed price be established for all grades, and that preconditions attached to weight limits be removed, at least until the crisis is over. That would enable farmers who buy calves in the autumn sales for fattening to plan with some confidence, and would help to shore up prices at the calf sales.

The argument for the removal of the ban on the export of Northern Ireland beef must not be abandoned. It has been suggested in some quarters that it could be lifted in the new year, but, given the Government's current attitude and interpretation, that seems unlikely. If the hassle between the UK and the European Union over throughput under the accelerated slaughter scheme is unresolved, pessimism will reign in Northern Ireland, and it could be 2000 or beyond before UK cow beef could appear in the marketplace. That would be totally unacceptable.

It must be emphasised that the beef industry in Northern Ireland already meets a number of the requirements of the Florence agreement, which were accepted as necessary to secure a step-by-step lifting of the ban. Northern Ireland is well placed in terms of animal identification and the recording of movement and total traceability, and it already meets the prerequisite for lifting the export ban.

Some 2,000 animals come under the BSE cohort slaughter programme. That number could be dealt with in weeks, if not five or six days. The accelerated slaughter programme was agreed in Florence last July as one of the conditions for lifting the export ban. The problem is that the scheme, which is 70 per cent. EU-funded, has not been finalised. Indeed, I understand that the Government have drawn back from it.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would be helpful if the Minister responded to that point? As the hon. Gentleman said, the Minister of Agriculture has said that we are holding back for the time being, but implied that the Government are invoking scientific justification for doing so. It was agreed at Florence that detailed proposals would be made by the British Government, so, if no proposals are put forward, the Government are in breach of the agreement.

Mr. McGrady: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and I agree with him. As I recall the sequence of events, the Florence convention was suspended—if that is the right word—because of what was alleged to be new veterinary scientific information. That information was apparently the decision by some—I emphasise, some—veterinary scientists that BSE was not necessarily caused by maternal transmission, but that the source was a possible predilection in the progeny of an infected cow. Consequently, the Government decided that BSE would somehow magically run itself out by the year 2003.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the Government have pulled back from the commitment given at Florence. That has had a further effect. It has undermined the good will that existed in the Commission, in Fischler, Yates and the other Agriculture Ministers. It was a regrettable step, and a devastating one for Northern Ireland. The Government seem reluctant to implement the Florence agreement to secure the immediate lifting, wholly or partly, of the ban on Northern Ireland beef.

In the meantime, there is a possibility of movement through consultation with the European Commission on proposals for relaxing the export restriction for animals from certified herds which have had no contact with BSE. I point out to the House that 97 per cent. of herds in Northern Ireland could qualify for the UK certified herd scheme. It is hoped that such a scheme could equate to the well-established farm quality assurance scheme.

I note that the chief veterinary officer for Northern Ireland is to meet tomorrow in Brussels his counterparts in the European Union Standing Veterinary Committee. I note that he will seek assurances that "going it alone" with the slaughter could open the way for the certified herd scheme. I sincerely hope that he will be successful, and that he will receive unanimous and strong support from the Government in his endeavours in that respect.

In Northern Ireland, as in the United Kingdom generally, any herd that has had a BSE-infected animal has been flagged by the Department of Agriculture. There is a major problem here, in that, in the United Kingdom, and only in the United Kingdom, it is the farm and not the herd or the animals that is flagged; in the rest of Europe, it is the herd that is flagged. Therefore, even if all the cattle on the flagged farm are removed and slaughtered, and new stock is brought in, flagging remains a total impediment. Surely we must all agree that that absurdity must be ended.

I understand that our flagging system happened by accident, and that the relevant wording in the legislation was not caught on to at the time. As I understand it, the European Commission is willing to address the erratum at an early date if effort is put into the matter.

In reality, while flagging applies to the farms, there is no realistic market for animals from flagged herds, which is disastrous for farmers in that category. Those most affected are the small suckler herd farmers, some dairy farmers, and farmers with a high-quality output. There must be a buy-out scheme for the suckler herds—about 300 in number—leading to the removal of flagging of holdings rather than herds, so that farmers can begin to rebuild their herds and their livelihoods. At present, their livestock will not be dealt with.

The 3 per cent. affected are made up of a number of elements. The suckler herds are only 0.75 per cent. of the 3 per cent. total. They are a small fraction, and could be dealt with if the Government could devise a scheme to

[Mr. McGrady]

allow herds to be depopulated, farm buildings to be cleaned out and farms to be restocked with non-BSE-infected cattle. Farmers could thus, we hope, gain certified herd status. Such schemes exist in the Republic of Ireland and other EC countries, so why can they not exist in the United Kingdom?

Is there not now an opportunity in this very small sector to introduce a beef herd set-aside scheme, similar to other agriculture set-aside schemes, starting with the BSE-flagged beef herds in Northern Ireland? I should like the Minister to take that point on board as a means of getting round an impossible situation for the 3 per cent. that are not covered by the certified herds scheme.

Another element creeps into the equation. There is an enormous backlog of cattle on farms waiting to go through the cull system. Many of them are dairy cows which are still being milked, and milk production is running way ahead of what it would normally be. It is clear that dairy farmers in the UK will be severely punished for producing over quota this year, which could trigger yet another penalty in the super-levy.

I suggest to the Government that the best way in which to deal with that problem is to plead exceptional circumstances, and either to negotiate extra milk quotas for this year in recognition of the dimension of the crisis or, if that is unsuccessful, at least to negotiate a substantial reduction in the super-levy.

I have covered a number of points on the issue, which, as I said at the start, is an absolute disaster for farmers in Northern Ireland. I will sum up the main points for the Minister's quick reference, in the hope that he will respond to them positively and helpfully. First, I would like him to address the point about the provision of additional cold storage and freezer capacity. Secondly, there is a need to provide extra rendering capacity either in Northern Ireland or elsewhere.

Thirdly, the compensation price must be improved; I have already mentioned the details. Fourthly, the Government should address the issue of matching EU funding to enable a substantial increase in the beef special premium and the suckler cow premium. Fifthly, HLCA payments should be increased substantially as a result of the autumn review to help the suckler cow farmers through the present crisis. In addition, there should be a compensatory payment for calves sold this autumn.

Sixthly, there must be a guarantee of continuing beef intervention, with all future Northern Ireland tenders being awarded, full and fixed prices being established for all grades, and no weight conditions. I hope that the provisions of an accelerated slaughter scheme will go ahead as soon as agreement is reached on compensation levels.

I ask that the flagging of holdings should stop, and that flagging should be applied to herds only. A buy-out scheme for flagged suckler herds should be introduced. I mention again the problem of extra milk, the quota and the super-levy, and how that problem could be addressed. Finally, the earliest possible removal of the ban on Northern Ireland beef exports is vital.

Last March, the British Government pledged themselves to do everything possible to safeguard the beef industry. It is now important that the Government display that commitment by an immediate action programme in some—I hope all—of the areas that I have indicated.

There has been throughout Europe a total acceptance of Northern Ireland's low level of BSE and of our much better traceability system. Such acceptance must be backed and strongly supported with an action plan that is capable of immediate implementation. Farmers demand and deserve that immediate action, and they look to the Government to provide it. Perhaps there will be some indication that the Government will take such action when the Minister winds up this debate.

In my opening remarks, I referred to the great famine in Ireland 150 years ago, and said that the BSE crisis is the greatest disaster to hit the farming community in Northern Ireland since then. At the time of the famine, Britain was accused of standing by and doing nothing. I hope that history will not repeat itself.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. It is clear that four Back-Bench Members wish to contribute to the debate. We have 50 minutes left, which includes the time for the winding-up speeches. I make an appeal for short, succinct speeches.

10.8 am

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I am grateful to the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) for initiating the debate. He reminded us several times of the famine in Ireland 150 years ago. Had it not been for that famine, I might have been a resident of County Cavan instead of living in the west of Scotland, where there is a large Irish community. Names such as Murphy and O'Neil suggest that the famine, which caused terrible hardship in Ireland, brought people to Scotland to seek a livelihood.

The Glasgow meat market is in my constituency, and I should stress that, with all due respect to the farmers, they are not the only people affected by the BSE crisis. I am not trying to underestimate their problems, but people living in the cities also face difficulties.

I understand that 5,000 head of cattle per week are being slaughtered in Scottish abattoirs. Those cattle do not have BSE; they are perfectly healthy animals that happen to be more than 30 months old. I should put it on record that, like Northern Ireland, Scotland has not been affected by BSE.

Recently, I had the pleasure of visiting Mr. Alec Henderson, who has a farm on the outskirts of Glasgow. He told me that butchers throughout the west of Scotland can put notes in their windows stating that their meat has been supplied by Mr. Alec Henderson, and that is sufficient assurance that it is BSE-free. I hope that the Minister recognises that many farms in Scotland are BSE-free because the farmers feed their cattle with produce that is grown on the farms. They do not use artificial feeds.

It has been estimated that, of the 5,000 head of cattle that are being slaughtered each week, 1,000 are destroyed in the Glasgow meat market. The Scottish Office has taken the same approach whenever there is a crisis—it has passed on the problem to someone else. In this case, a so-called liaison committee has been created in Scotland, and Ministers have allowed it to rule the roost.

It is clear that some people will make a fantastic amount of money out of the crisis. One does not need to be a mathematician to work out that, if 1,000 head of

cattle pass through one meat market every week, and, having been destroyed, their skins are sold to the leather tanneries, some people will make large sums of money. Yet, at the other end of the scale, farmers and wholesale butchers will lose.

If 30-month-old cattle have to be destroyed in the meat market, the wholesale butchers who have operated in the Glasgow meat market for more than 100 years will not be allowed to slaughter the meat they sell there. That will have the ludicrous result that wholesale butchers who operate in the Glasgow meat market will have to go elsewhere to slaughter the cattle that are normally killed in the market.

In today's short debate, it is hard to describe the Glasgow meat market, but I should mention that it occupies considerable acreage in my constituency. People tell me that, if 1,000 cattle pass through the meat market every week, there must be employment there, but there will be a price. As I have said, the wholesale butchers will have to consider leaving the premises that some of them have occupied for more than 100 years.

We must also consider what will happen after all the cattle have been killed. In my constituency, there will be a great empty building that no one will want. I know that that is the responsibility of the Scottish Office, not the Minister who is present.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been in the House for many years. He really must relate his remarks to the Northern Irish cattle coming through the Glasgow meat market; otherwise, he will be out of order.

Mr. Martin: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Perhaps I should have explained that the Glasgow meat market was built not only to deal with home stock, but to cope with the Irish market. Irish cattle also come through that market, and that is why I am participating in the debate.

I refer to the point raised by the hon. Member for South Down about the crisis in the rest of the United Kingdom. I am often reminded by some of his colleagues in the Ulster Unionist party that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom. Irish farmers and the Glasgow meat market have been affected by the BSE crisis.

I stress again that some people are making an awful lot of money out of the crisis. I shall not say too much about that, but some of those on the so-called liaison committee are set to make a financial killing. I am not suggesting that they are dishonourable, but I am concerned that they may have a conflict of interest.

The Scottish Office has put such pressure on the cattle markets, that, as we have discussed in the House, there is concern about the welfare of animals which have to wait in trucks for hours on end. I hope that the Minister will take my concern to the Scottish Office, that, unless some of the smaller abattoirs are reopened, cattle will continue to suffer while they are waiting for slaughter. No one in the House or the country wants to see that.

Finally, we have to consider the head boners in the meat industry. They do not have a very pleasant job, but they have worked hard, honestly and in good faith. The Scottish Office told them to cease business, yet they have received not a ha'penny in compensation. Some of those men and women worked for 20 or 30 years in that industry and received no complaints about hygiene or any other aspect of their work. They were told to cease trading, and some of their mortgages and businesses have been threatened. Business in that industry is now non-existent.

If Ministers can tell the Tory party conference that the farmers will receive compensation, they should consider other people who are involved in the meat industry. Let me say, with no disrespect to the farmers, that others in the industry are also losing financially.

10.18 am

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): We have listened to two very interesting speeches. I assure the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) that those of us who take an interest in the cattle industry understand that its effects extend far beyond the farm gate. I am sure that, like me, he is grateful to the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) for raising this matter. It gives us a chance to express yet again concerns that we all have about the industry, the many ramifications of which were totally unforeseen until the disaster struck.

The hon. Member for South Down has rehearsed the concerns fairly comprehensively, and therefore made it easier for those who follow him to cover the matters on which he has given details. There are also, however, one or two matters that he missed.

As he pointed out, Northern Ireland exported 80 per cent. of its beef. A considerable amount of that entered Great Britain and, to some extent, Northern Ireland was caught by the ban on British beef. It seems that the Irish Republic has escaped because it is a separate country, yet it has an incidence of BSE that must be extremely worrying to Mr. Yates and members of the Irish Government.

The British beef market was immediately depressed as soon as Northern Ireland beef entered it—such beef had no place else to go. If we resolved the problem of Northern Ireland beef, it would therefore relieve the downward pressure on the entire British beef market and tremendously benefit all of us—not least the constituents of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn.

Northern Ireland can, of course, meet the accredited herd requirements much quicker than the rest of the United Kingdom, but even if the European Community accepted the Government's accreditation scheme, it would still demand that the UK abide by the Florence agreement. The Government are trying to shut their eyes to this real and major problem, but I do not think that it will go away.

In order to comply with the scheme, Northern Ireland needs to slaughter about 2,000 cattle in 790 herds—not very many cattle per herd. On top of that, there is a backlog, to which the hon. Member for South Down referred, of 90,000 cattle, comprising 40,000 30-month-plus cattle and perhaps 50,000 cull cows, which is a fast-developing problem for farmers in terms of feed, shelter and wet land. Land is very rapidly becoming wet through.

If Northern Ireland could resume its exports beyond the shores of the nation, it would immediately benefit its farmers and the general economy there, and, as I have said, reduce the depressant effect of Northern Ireland beef on the Great Britain market, which would relieve problems and give a tremendous lift to the income of Great Britain beef producers.

[Mr. William Ross]

The Government seem to be taking the view not only that is the Florence scheme atrociously expensive—which it is—but that it is unnecessary on any scientific grounds. I happen to agree with them. Perception is the determining factor. I fear that perception will be the determining factor in another matter that will come before the House this afternoon.

The Government believe that, by removing the 20 to 25 per cent. of beef in the market by the methods that have been and are presently deployed, a balance will be created between production and consumption, and therefore nothing more will be needed to be done. That may be true, but even if it is, there is a great chasm between where we are and that happy outcome. We need a bridge to get from where we are to where we have to be.

What needs to be done to resolve the problem in Northern Ireland? I speak about Northern Ireland not only because it is the subject of this debate but because of the ramifications it has for the rest of the kingdom. If Northern Ireland can clear the backlog, it can reach compliance with the accredited herd scheme standards. That means slaughtering the 2,000 cattle in Northern Ireland, which is proving to be the road block.

We should not be mistaken about the fact that the EC will use the fact that those 2,000 cattle are not slaughtered as a road block to reopening the export market for Northern Ireland cattle. That tiny number of the total national herd must be taken out of the equation as quickly as possible. If that is done, we will be able to export beef not only to Great Britain but—I hope—much further afield.

The hon. Member for South Down also referred to the problem of flagged holdings, which I agree must be addressed and resolved urgently. If it is not resolved, supermarkets will try to outdo each other in the purity of the products on sale. That will simply mean that they will not be willing to sell beef from a flagged holding. That would be a serious marketing problem. It is not very often mentioned, but it must be borne in mind. The Government must sort out this crazy system of flagging holdings rather than cattle.

The Government must understand that their efforts to reduce compensation for 30-month-plus cattle is totally wrong. Why should those who have had to keep their cattle the longest wind up with the least money? Farmers are well aware that, when a small technical change appears in the press or is announced from a Government source, it might not seem very significant, but it often represents a difference as great as that, which we in this House know from legislation, between "may" and "shall".

Farmers want to reduce the weights for cattle for which they will be able to claim compensation, but once they do that, they run across the age-weight problem. In order to get the second punching, cattle have to be kept until they reach a certain age. If they are kept until that age, they are over the weight. The farmer has a nice little choice. He can forgo the second punching, which involves a considerable sum at the moment, or go over it and run foul of the weight restriction. The Government must be a little more honest in dealing with that.

There has to be a serious and sustained effort to ensure that all farmers get away a proportion—which they expected from the very outset but has not materialised—of their cull cows and 30-month-old cattle so that there is no favouritism. Let us be clear. If the Government had taken on the job of running the scheme themselves, there would not have been any favouritism. We might have had a moan, but there would not have been favouritism.

We know of farmers whose cattle have been listed for slaughter from the first day, but who still have them, yet dealers seem to be able to buy them and get them off their premises in a day or two. That is causing great resentment among the farming community. Farmers also think that, whenever they try the help line, the telephone must have been left off the hook.

What information has the Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry in Northern Ireland made available to the meat plants regarding the number, types and age of cohorts of cattle on farms in Northern Ireland? It has been put to me that it is possible for meat plants to tap into the central computer. If that is so, information that should be commercially confidential to farmers is available to meat plants, which is very much to the commercial advantage of the meat plants and the disadvantage of the farming community. The system was never designed for such use, and I should be glad to have an assurance that what I have been told is incorrect.

If the Government cannot get rid of the backlog, would they be prepared to buy up the cull cattle and arrange for the feeding of them so that use can be made of the feed that is lying around? People are frightened to buy that feed. People who are losing between £200 and £300 a head on last year's cattle are in no position to go to market this year. But they may have some feed left, and that could be used. People will not take action off their own bats, but if the scheme that I believe has been suggested by the Ulster Farmers Union were put into operation, it would go a considerable way towards helping to resolve the problems we face now.

10.29 am

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak, and I intend to be brief. I shall press the Minister to answer a particular question. Is there any liaison between the Northern Ireland Office and the Scottish Office, aimed at ensuring that, in terms of the Florence agreement, there is an agreed path towards beginning the accelerated cull, at least in Northern Ireland and Scotland, and that that can be put forward as part of the United Kingdom proposals under the agreement?

I am sure that hon. Members from Northern Ireland will agree when I tell the Minister that, if the Government simply stand by what the Minister of Agriculture said in the House on Monday, there will be not only anxiety but anger in Scotland and in Northern Ireland, because the interests of people there are being sacrificed for the sake of the division of opinion within the United Kingdom. What I propose seems to be within the Government's power, even considering the understood difficulties that they face.

The Minister must accept that Northern Ireland has an especially good record on the incidence of BSE, and also has a traceability scheme. Scotland comes close behind in terms of its incidence, which is falling, and also has an accreditation scheme. The scheme would be better if it were fully computerised, and we would like help from the Scottish Office so that that can be done.

It is not acceptable for Scottish and Irish specialist beef producers to be told that, despite assurances by the Prime Minister, no less, that, under the Florence agreement,

there would be progress towards the lifting of the ban, and despite the recognition that Scotland and Northern Ireland could be in the vanguard of the process, their interests will not be taken forward.

Everybody recognises that the problem cannot simply be regionalised. That would be an over-simplistic solution. But we cannot allow the present state of confusion, disarray and shambles to continue, with specialist beef producers given no idea of what they can expect. They are now buying cattle at 25 to 30 per cent. below last year's market prices, in the hope that the home market will hold together and that there will be no further crisis to depress prices. They have to gamble on whether the export ban will be lifted within the maturation period of the cattle now coming on to the market. That is a pretty difficult situation for farmers to operate in.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) talked about his local special interest, but I believe that in my constituency I may have a greater concentration of beef production in all its aspects, across the board and from start to finish, than any other Member who represents anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

Of course it is not only farmers who are affected. Cattle marts, abattoirs, refrigeration and transport companies and a variety of other service companies are affected, too. Thousands of jobs are at stake and thousands of incomes severely depressed. People face potential ruin. Yet, six months into the crisis, the Government have not even carried out their basic undertakings to the European Commission, which were to put forward detailed proposals on how to implement an agreed cull.

Worse than that, the Government are now backing off, saying that they are not sure whether there is a case for going ahead with the cull that they previously agreed. The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) is right to say that the good will that has existed so far within the European Commission will evaporate if we do not make detailed proposals, as we have undertaken to do.

It is not good enough for Ministers to say that there is new scientific information. There is always new scientific information. That is the nature of science—and it is no excuse for not having made proposals on the basis of the scientific information available. If that includes a Government belief that, since the Florence agreement, new data have appeared that affect the outcome, let us by all means incorporate them into the detailed proposals.

Farmers in Northern Ireland and Scotland, and all those whose work is ancillary to the beef production industry, demand that the Government take action under the terms of the Florence agreement. Will the Minister tell me whether there is active discussion between his Department and the Scottish Office so that they will be able to lead the way for the United Kingdom out of the bind, and implement the Florence agreement?

10.34 am

Rev. William McCrea (Mid–Ulster): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) on his timely action in bringing this matter before the House. I assure him, and the leader of his party, that the leader of my party and all its Members will join the other Members of the House, especially those from Northern Ireland, in making a united case. That has been happening already. Only the other day, the three Members of the European Parliament for Northern Ireland stood united, shoulder to shoulder, on the important issue before us.

I am delighted that the Minister of State is at the Dispatch Box to answer the debate, because I believe that he is genuinely interested in all matters relevant to the Province.

Sad to say, while we were facing a great crisis, other European countries tried to take advantage of the problems facing our beef industry, and of the British horror scenario. But for some of them it backfired. They intended to enter the markets to take advantage of our tragedy, but found that raising the issue backfired on them at home.

The crisis affects not only agriculture but Northern Ireland as a whole, because the beef industry is our chief industry, and is worth £500 million to the Northern Ireland economy. It employs not only 25,000 people directly, on the farms and in processing, but many thousands of others in packaging, transport, distribution and sales. That is why the spin-off from the tragedy is hitting so many of our people. If decisive action is not taken soon, there will be no beef industry left. Radical steps are needed to restore confidence.

The ban on beef exports hits Northern Ireland especially hard because, as has already been said, 70 to 80 per cent. of all our beef production is sold outside the Province. Therefore, the fight must continue to establish that Ulster beef should have a BSE status separate from that of the rest of the United Kingdom.

Many of the reasons have been outlined already. Compared with the mainland, there is a minimal incidence of BSE in Northern Ireland; 34 per cent. of herds on the mainland have been struck by BSE, but only 3 per cent. of the herds in Northern Ireland. In Great Britain, 160,000 BSE cases have been recorded; the figure for Northern Ireland is 1,600. Yet Northern Ireland has more than 10 per cent. of the United Kingdom beef herd.

The main difference between the situation in Northern Ireland and that in the rest of the United Kingdom is that a full record is kept, which means that the background, health and contacts of all cattle are fully traceable. It has been acknowledged that we have one of the best schemes anywhere in Europe. Not only that, but other countries in the European Community have acknowledged that we have the best beef production anywhere in the world.

I know of countries that would be proud to accept Ulster beef, and delighted to sell it on their markets—but unfortunately, because of the decision in Europe, that cannot be done. I believe that the quality of our beef can meet the challenge of that produced anywhere else in the world, and that we could market it. But market outlets in Europe and beyond have made it clear that, although they would be prepared to sell our beef, they are prevented from doing so. The case for a separate BSE status for Northern Ireland beef is unassailable.

The farmers are the innocent people in the story. They did nothing wrong. They listened to the guidance given them by the Department. Yet despite that, they are paying the price. We must recognise that the farmers did not do something wrong to make a quick buck or a quick pound, and the Government owe it to a vital industry to compensate them during this great crisis.

It is sad to see big men in markets with tears in their eyes as they give away their cattle, but they realise that they cannot keep the animals, as they do not have feedingstuffs for the winter. The farming industry must

[Rev. William McCrea]

not allow any dealer to make himself fat from the horror and tragedy that many ordinary decent farmers are facing because of these burdens.

As summer comes to an end, feeding cattle outside will be drawn to a conclusion. We are now entering the winter months, and many farmers will not have the finance necessary to provide food for their animals. I know of farmers who have gone to the bank and have been told not to write another cheque—not even for food for their own families. We must remember that many banks encouraged farmers to borrow, but—at the first sign of crisis—they will not even allow a farmer to write a cheque to put food on the table for his family. This is a human crisis, as well as an appalling crisis facing the industry.

In a recent debate in another forum, it was unanimously demanded that Northern Ireland be recognised as having special status for BSE purposes, so that the worldwide export ban can be lifted as quickly as possible; that the backlog of cattle in the over-30-month cattle slaughter scheme be eliminated; that BSE flagging should apply to herds, and not holdings, and that a voluntary buy-up scheme be introduced for BSE flagged suckler herds; that specific beef intervention for Northern Ireland be introduced; that the Government provide fair and adequate compensation for beef producers in keeping with their previous commitments; and that the HLCAs be increased in the autumn review.

These points have been unanimously expressed by hon. Members today. I hope that, as a result of the political unanimity in Northern Ireland, the Minister will concede our request, and that the Government will take urgent action on this very important issue.

10.42 am

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) on raising this important issue, and congratulate the other hon. Members who have taken part in a well-informed debate. The debate is especially timely, as it follows the Government's decision not to proceed with the selective cull of cattle, along with Monday's meeting in Northern Ireland with members of the European Parliament and the President of the Council of Agriculture Ministers.

The crisis has been with us since March this year, and we appear to be no further forward in our efforts to lift the European ban. The importance of the beef industry to Northern Ireland has been mentioned this morning and previously in the House. The export trade is valued at about £500 million, and 80 per cent. of beef from Northern Ireland is exported—mainly to Europe. More than 16,000 farms rely on cattle to some extent.

Yet, at the same time, the incidence of BSE in Northern Ireland is about 1 per cent. of the United Kingdom rate. That is mainly due to the traceability systems in operation in Northern Ireland, which must be replicated throughout the rest of the United Kingdom if we are to reduce the incidence of BSE and create the conditions to allow the ban to be lifted. The Minister of Agriculture has circulated a letter to all hon. Members this morning that refers to the proposed passport system, which will go some way to addressing the concerns.

The fiasco since March has continued because of the possible link between Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and BSE, and the implementation of the ban by the European Parliament. We do not appear to be any closer to the lifting of that ban, despite the Government's decision to cull all cattle over the age of 30 months. Problems have arisen with that cull as a result of the lack of rendering capacity and cold storage, both of which have been mentioned this morning. There have also been allegations that some abattoirs have been selected in preference to others, and will be allowed to profiteer at the expense of the other abattoirs.

On the question of cold storage, I understand that another £16.6 million has been made available for extra cold storage facilities. An article in *The Guardian* last Friday referred to the possibility of the Government hiring cold storage ships to meet the demand for facilities as our existing cold storage facilities are—or will shortly be—exhausted. It is also argued that the £16.6 million has been made available by reducing the compensation payments that have been made to farmers affected by the crisis.

The lack of rendering capacity and cold storage are examples of the incompetence of the Government in dealing with this issue. The cold storage is necessary, and the backlog must be addressed. We have heard several times—and heard again this morning—that farmers are now facing the costs of food and shelter for their animals as we approach the winter months.

The backlog in Northern Ireland of animals in the over-30-month scheme is about 90,000, and this must be addressed. We are also conscious that farmers with animals that are waiting the longest to be part of the cull will be given the least compensation, as the Minister's letter tends to confirm. He said that market conditions have now led to a reduction in the compensation that is to be made available.

In June, the Florence summit set a framework that, we were led to believe, could have led to the lifting of the export ban. The summit proposed five stages and a number of preconditions that had to be met by the Government before the Commission would consider lifting the ban. The Prime Minister told the House that the stages would be considered only and exclusively on the basis of public health, objective scientific criteria and the judgment of the Commission. It is important to recognise that the objective criteria will be judged by the same scientists who recommended the imposition of the export ban.

The preconditions include the accelerated selective slaughter programme, which will try to accelerate the decline in the incidence of BSE. That programme was approved by the Commission, and the number of cattle suggested for that cull varied between 20,000 and 150,000. Other preconditions were: the recording of movement, identification and registration; the removal of meat and bonemeal from feed and farms; the confirmation of the over-30-month culling scheme; and improved procedures for the removal of specified bovine materials from carcases.

The Prime Minister said that, if those conditions were met, the export ban could be lifted over five stages. But he also said that the ban could be lifted by October, and it is quite clear that he was way off the mark. Those stages related to certified herds, animals born after a specified date and the export of embryos—which would come later—and meat from animals under 30 months of age.

The ban on meat from animals over 30 months would remain, but the basic preconditions were that the cull of animals aged over 30 months should continue and that the

accelerated selective cull should take place. There have been delays in the over-30-month cull—as I have stated—but the selective cull was suspended by the Government in the week of 20 September 1996.

As luck would have it, I was in the European Parliament the following morning when Commissioner Franz Fischler addressed the Parliament on agricultural issues, and I can tell the House that he was completely surprised by the Government's decision to suspend the scheme. Most of the MEPs in the Chamber—I spoke to a few—were also surprised by the Government's decision. That raises the question whether the European Commission was consulted before the Government decided to suspend the cull. Obviously, that was done on the basis of the Oxford study, which mentioned the phasing out of BSE by 2001.

As the Minister repeated in the Chamber on Monday, however, there are signs that European member states would not agree to lift the ban even if the selective cull took place. What evidence is there for that? If the Minister cannot answer today, perhaps he can write to me once he has consulted the Minister of Agriculture.

The reaction of the Commissioner in the European Parliament that morning was that he had not been consulted. He gave no sign that there would be any reluctance on the part of the Commission to the lifting of the ban if the selective cull took place. One thing was clear when he addressed the European Parliament that morning—he said that the conditions of the Florence framework still stood. Regardless of the Oxford study and the Minister's view of what the Commission might or might not do, the Government would have to meet the conditions of that agreement before the ban could be lifted.

At the moment, we are unable to meet two of the conditions of the framework. We cannot achieve the over-30-month cull until later this year—probably into next—and we cannot achieve a selective cull, because of the Government's attitude to the Commission and their belief that the Oxford study suggests that whatever we do would make no difference.

I agree with the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce)—what are the Government going to do? Are we going to wait until 2001 to discover whether BSE dies out? Or are the Government going to take action to renegotiate the Florence framework to put in place a proper timetable? It is all right the Government saying that the Oxford study says that the selective cull is no good. The National Farmers Union said as long ago as July that such a cull had no scientific basis. The Commission is sticking to the Florence timetable, and the Government have to take some action to get the framework in place so that the ban is lifted.

The idea of certified herds is welcome for Northern Ireland, which has had fewer than 2000 cases of BSE—46 this year. A selective cull would enable Northern Ireland to meet the Florence framework; I endorse the words of the Minister of Agriculture, who said that the certified herd system lent itself well to Northern Ireland.

Better news for Northern Ireland came from the meeting on Monday between Members of the European Parliament and the president of the Council of Agriculture Ministers, which suggested that initiatives could take place to enable Northern Ireland to meet the Florence framework. I agree with Mr. Yates, who said that they had set out a route for a regional initiative, and that the British Government should treat Northern Ireland as a first pilot scheme for implementing the Florence agreement on selective culling. The Government should allow Northern Ireland to meet the conditions, and thus enable the ban to be lifted in the Province.

10.52 am

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) and I shall try to pick up as many of his points as I can. He invited me to write to him if I could not answer one question in detail, and I undertake to do so during the next few days.

This has been a particularly important debate for Northern Ireland, as has been evidenced by the number of Members representing Northern Ireland who have attended. They have included the right hon. Members for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) and for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux) and the hon. Members for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) and for South Antrim (Mr. Forsythe), as well as those who managed to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In the few minutes left to me, I shall certainly try to pick up as many points as I can. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) on the way in which he opened the debate. He spoke for the farming community and all the political parties in Northern Ireland by expressing in some detail his concern about this important issue, which he correctly described as one of the greatest setbacks in the past 150 years. That was a theme of many of the other speeches.

I shall try to answer as many of his questions as I can to help him. He spoke about speeding up the over-30-month cull. By the end of October, I hope to be able to double the rate of the cull to 8,000 animals a week. As I understand it, the Lisburn facility will be fully operational again on 28 October, more cold storage space is being made available, and there is no shortage.

Since the beginning of the crisis—that is a greatly overused word in this place, but it is correctly employed when dealing with this subject—all but one of the Northern Ireland tenders have been met in full. The Government are consulting the farming unions in Northern Ireland on how the additional £60 million is to be spent.

With regard to the Florence agreement—the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) also intervened on this subject—the selective cull is only suspended, and the Government are proceeding in accordance with that agreement, looking at all the scientific evidence, and in consultation with European Commission authorities.

The hon. Member for South Down asked whether the Government could guarantee that intervention tenders would be met in full in future. That is for the European Union beef management committee to decide. The Government will press for all tenders to be awarded in full. He also asked about calf sales. So far, calf prices in the autumn sales in Northern Ireland are holding up well.

As one might suppose, the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) spoke with his customary authority as a farmer. He properly reminded the House that the problems affect the community as a whole, and

[Sir John Wheeler]

extend well beyond the farm gate. He is right. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) also pointed that out, and raised a number of questions relating to Scotland, which my colleagues in the Scottish Office will be interested to consider.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry also spoke about the help line telephone being off the hook. I take that seriously. The responsible officials will look into that matter to ensure that, when the telephone is used, help is available to those who seek it.

If the Government get approval for the certified herd scheme, they will consider the selective culling of the 2,000 or so animals in Northern Ireland. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the over-30-month scheme. I can tell him that meat plants cannot tap into the Government's computer, as that would be illegal under the Data Protection Acts—a real constraint. The Government could have run the booking system more fairly, but the problem with that suggestion is that commencement would have been significantly delayed.

The hon. Member for Mid–Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) also spoke powerfully, pointing out that all Northern Ireland is united in trying to deal with the problem. The European ban on exports of British beef and beef products is damaging the livelihoods of all those dependent on the beef industry, and arguably nowhere more so than in Northern Ireland, with its heavy dependence on exports to Europe and beyond.

It should be noted that, before the EU ban was imposed, between 1991 and 1995 farm incomes in Northern Ireland had risen by about 91 per cent. in real terms. Now, the effects of the ban are being felt much more widely in Northern Ireland than simply in the agriculture industry.

Reference has been made to the special arrangement for Northern Ireland, and I shall say briefly in the minute that I have left that the answer, the Government contend, does not lie in that direction. The solution is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must now move on to Her Majesty's Government's policy on Latin America.

Latin America

11 am

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I am most grateful to Madam Speaker for granting this Adjournment debate, the latest in the current Session, on Britain's relations with Latin America. This is the ninth successive yearly debate that we have had on Latin America, a tradition started in the House in 1988. It is interesting to contrast the debate those nine years ago with the debate today, based on the situation in Latin America in those years.

Nine years ago, we were viewing the early stages of a return to democracy and the demise of the dictatorships that so stained the reputation of Latin America. The House itself was involved in heated ideological warfare with Chile on the one hand and Nicaragua and Cuba on the other, and Latin America was then a byword for high inflation. Today, we debate Latin America against a background of stable economies and stable Governments. It is interesting that the recent great political pressures in Venezuela and in Paraguay did not lead to the traditional overthrow of the Government and imposition of a dictator.

In recent years, we have also witnessed the impeachment processes of the Presidents of Brazil and of Colombia and how that painful process resulted in democracy holding sway, albeit with very different outcomes in the two countries. Today in Latin America there are stable economies, stable Governments, historically low inflation, growth, open markets and privatisation, all of which provide great opportunities for Britain.

We should not forget the power of the Latin American region. It ranks alongside the Pacific rim and southern Asia in opportunities for our country. Latin America's economy is equal to or greater than those of Africa, the Indian sub-continent and south-east Asia put together. We should reflect on the fact that Brazil alone has an economy as powerful as that of Spain and that its state of Sao Paulo alone has an economy equal to that of Belgium.

The economy of Mexico is greater than those of Sweden, Hong Kong and Nigeria put together. The economies of Venezuela and Colombia, taken together, are more powerful than that of South Africa, an area in which this country takes a considerable interest. Last, but not least, Chile's economy is greater than that of either Malaysia or Singapore.

British interests in Latin America are nothing new. George Canning, then Foreign Secretary, said in a Commons debate in 1826 that Britain had

"called the New World into existence, to redress the balance of the Old."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1826; Vol. 16, (2nd Series) c. 397.]

From independence onwards, Britain has taken a major partnership role in the region's development, involving railways, public utilities, banking and shipping, to mention but a few aspects.

The historic links with this country are perhaps best exemplified by an event that is taking place just a few hundred yards from the House, as President Eduardo Frei of Chile lays a wreath at the tomb of Admiral Lord Cochrane in Westminster abbey. The House will perhaps recall the colourful career of that naval officer, who took a leading role in the independence struggles not only of Chile but also of Brazil and of Greece. Lord Cochrane's

contribution to Latin American independence ranks alongside the midwife roles of Canning, of Ponsonby in Uruguay and of the British soldiers and sailors of the Legion Britanica who served under Simon Bolivar in the independence struggle in northern and western south America.

So much for history; what of today? Our Foreign Affairs Select Committee has just returned from its journeyings in Latin America duly impressed, and we look forward to its report. The Inter-Parliamentary Union has dispatched delegations to Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil in the past three months, all of which have been successful. Members of the House have played a key role in the six successive Argentine-British conferences, which have done so much to reconstruct relations between our two countries following the tragedy of the south Atlantic only 14 years ago.

In all those ventures, our embassies and consulates in the region have played a valuable facilitating role. I pay tribute to the valued work of our diplomats in all the countries of Latin America—we can proudly use the word "all", with the recent opening of our new embassy in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic.

There was a time, particularly under previous Governments, when we closed and reopened missions with the regularity of yo-yos. I hope that the tight spending round in progress will not lead to a recurrence of that dismal process and that my hon. Friend the Minister will be a doughty fighter on our behalf in that respect. That is particularly important, as Latin America represents a massive opportunity for Britain, which we would do well indeed to get up and grasp.

I commend the proposed conference of key British business men due to be held in January next year, co-ordinated by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of Trade and Industry, with key Latin American speakers from the highest level in the continent. It will be a magnificent opportunity for British business to learn more, building on the "Links into Latin America" programme of the DTI. I also commend the initiatives of Canning house, the Latin American centre in London, and its series of conferences and seminars, not least in the educational sphere.

Perhaps the biggest challenge in Latin America is the development of trading blocs. Mercosur, which is in effect the southern common market, was established as recently as 1991 by Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, and has flourished. Although much work needs to be done to free up sectors and to apply a common external tariff, the volume of intra-group trade between the countries has grown impressively. In 1990, the year before Mercosur's inception, trade among the four countries amounted to $4 billion; by 1995 it had more than tripled to $14.5 billion. The impact of Mercosur is clear.

Above all, the venture of Mercosur is seen as a union of nation states with a minimum of supranational institutions, and with decisions taken by consensus. It is significant that it is avoiding the pitfalls of excessive bureaucracy, over-regulation and money-churning that have become the hallmark of the European Union. To date, Mercosur has maintained only a small secretariat in Montevideo and work is conducted through joint working parties, particularly to deal with the non-tariff issues.

Both President Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil and President Carlos Menem of Argentina have given an impressive lead in those developments, and the four countries are pushing a five-year programme to develop the free trade area and the customs union.

Close ties are being developed with Chile. Tariffs are falling and Chile, the region's fastest growing economy, is coming closer to Mercosur. Bolivia is next into the frame to be associated with it. Mercosur has concluded an inter-regional co-operation agreement with the European Union that was signed in Madrid a year ago.

Sir Kenneth Carlisle (Lincoln): I was interested to hear what my hon. Friend had to say about Mercosur. Does he agree that one of the most interesting developments to arise from that freer, larger market is the substantial investment by European and other countries in the Mercosur countries, especially in the automobile industry? There has been great investment by, for example, Volkswagen and Fiat simply because the market in that area is so much bigger now.

Mr. Arnold: Stability and free trade have already had the remarkable effects for Mercosur that I have outlined. The opportunities for British investment are certainly there. I hope that the Rover Group will read the debate and bring its proposals for that area to a more rapid conclusion.

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): Does my hon. Friend recall that the Trade and Industry Select Committee visited Argentina and Brazil last year and submitted a report to the House pointing out the advantages for British companies in trading with both those countries and in looking more widely to the Mercosur region? There are considerable opportunities. Mercosur is a very good and expanding organisation.

Mr. Arnold: I thank my hon. Friend for raising the important Select Committee on Trade and Industry report and the hard work done by the Committee, which I hope will further highlight the opportunities for Britain.

Elsewhere in the continent, progress is being made by Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela in the rejuvenation of the Grupo Andino, which is working on a free trade agreement with Mercosur, perhaps including Peru, and with which Panama is associated.

The process undertaken by Mercosur and the Grupo Andino contrasts with the north American free trade agreement, which was severely jolted by the Mexican financial crisis last year—a crisis that brought about a paralysis of any extension of NAFTA which has been exacerbated by United States internal politics.

All this points to opportunities for Britain and Europe. There is a growing tide of opinion in favour of a coherent relationship between a Latin American trading bloc bringing together its component parts, and a partnership with Europe and other regions around the world. The NAFTA experience and the Uncle Sam tendency, best exemplified by the haughty treatment of Colombia when it was struggling with the drugs menace can only emphasise Latin America's will to have close ties with the wider world.

All these matters underline the key role and opportunity for Britain. We are the natural point for Latin American countries' relationship with Europe—the logical first port

[Mr. Arnold]

of call in Europe. President Frei is here today. President Zedillo of Mexico was here earlier this year, when he addressed a meeting of both Houses of Parliament in an exceptional way. President Cardoso of Brazil is expected next year. Dozens of other high-powered Ministers, business men and so on have come to London in recent months.

Not only is London the world's leading financial and business centre, but our patterns of international trade are unique in Europe. That best ties in with the interest and preference of the Latin American republics. We are the obvious champions for Latin America within the counsels of Europe. Whereas France, Spain and Portugal have interests, particularly agricultural ones, which are competitive with those of Latin America, our interests are almost entirely complementary to those of Latin America. I look forward to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office highlighting our work in that context.

To highlight the economic progress of the past year, I point to the stable currencies and low inflation in Brazil and Argentina, although I wonder what pressures are building up behind their highly valued currencies. We should note the continued excellent performance of Chile and the renaissance of Peru and Bolivia. Mexico is making a steady recovery after its financial crisis last year. We are also witnessing a coherent fight in Venezuela. Many of us were fascinated to hear the presentation at the House yesterday by the Venezuelan Finance Minister and the president of its central bank.

It is interesting to note in passing that the economy of the Falkland islands is also doing well, particularly in the fishing sector and the oil industry, in which more harmony is developing with its neighbour, Argentina.

Over the years, Britain has been a leading partner in infrastructure projects. One thinks of the Rio-Niterói bridge in Brazil, and we are looking at the Bolivia-Brazil pipeline. A massive series of projects is linked with the Hidrovia project—a project to develop the navigational capacity of the Parana and Paraguay rivers and their tributaries, from their upper waters in Bolivia and Brazil through Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina to the River Plate and the Atlantic ocean. The scale of the engineering projects—to the tune of US$2 billion—presents massive opportunities for British companies. From the upstream terminus at Puerto Suarez in Bolivia, through the navigation channel up the Itaipu dam, opening up the Brazilian waterways as far as Sao Paulo, down to Nueva Palmira in Uruguay—the major open sea port at the mouth—there is much work to be done. Furthermore, there is the massive proposal for a River Plate bridge between Buenos Aires and Colonia del Sacramento in Uruguay. I hope that our embassies in all five countries are on the ball, and that our excellent trade promoters will alert potential British participants to the opportunities.

Privatisation is one of the greatest recent British success stories, and it is being emulated throughout the region. There are massive opportunities for British expertise and experience, not only in the process itself and the development of local stock markets but in popular shareholding. There is also a massive opportunity for British investment in the privatised companies. Our record, notwithstanding local successes such as British Gas in Buenos Aires, is not as good as it might be. There is much to be done. We must be in there, playing a leading part as the privatisation programme continues to roll out.

Education and training is another area of opportunity for us. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment recently visited Chile and Colombia and my noble Friend Lord Henley has visited Brazil, Argentina and Mexico. It is fascinating to note the enthusiasm of many Latin American countries for our national vocational qualification system. A major project is under way in Mexico in conjunction with our National Council for Vocational Qualifications. That project is funded by the World bank. There are also interesting developments in Colombia, Argentina and Brazil in that respect.

Throughout the region, there is dynamic activity in English language teaching, British cultural events and projects involving British higher education. This is being fostered and led by the British Council and its sister Cultura Inglesa institutes. Local British schools, notably in São Paulo and Buenos Aires, are flourishing. I am sure that the work of all of them will be encouraged by the Government.

Drugs are a scourge that afflicts Latin America, taking up too much Government time, corrupting the body politic and ruining lives. Let us always remember that the drug trade would not exist if the developed world did not pay very high prices for the deadly stuff. The solution is co-operation, not head banging. The disgraceful treatment of Colombia by the United States, with its certification process, is not the answer. The discreet professional assistance that we provide to Colombia and other Latin American Governments is the commendable route to take.

Latin America is a vibrant and developing area of the world and we ignore it at our peril. We must redouble our efforts, work with our friends and play a part in the continent, because it will rank alongside the Pacific rim as a focus of growth in the 21st century.

11.18 am

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I shall speak briefly and I hope that the House will forgive me if I leave briefly when I have finished speaking. I will return for the rest of the debate.

It is good that we are yet again debating the situation in Latin America and relations with it. As the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) said, this is the ninth year that we have had such a debate. It is usually at 3 o'clock in the morning, so this is a great improvement. We should put it on record that President Frei of Chile is visiting Britain this week. In the sense that he represents democracy in Chile and the removal of the dictatorship, his visit is extremely welcome.

Far less welcome are the strong rumours that General Pinochet is also in Britain. He is associated with the reign of terror in Chile and the destruction of human rights as well as of many Chilean trade unions and other organisations. He is here, presumably, on yet another arms buying spree. His very existence serves as a memory of the danger of the power of the military to any democratic movement in Latin America. Of course, the British Governments of the past happily sold arms to that dictator.

The hon. Member for Gravesham is true to himself, as he preaches privatisation in this country and everywhere else. He is an advocate of the trickle-down theory,

whereby, if one makes a lot of people very rich, some of the poor might get a bob or two as a result. Unfortunately, the trickle-down theory does not work here any more than it works anywhere else, as he may well know.

The hon. Gentleman offered a rosy view of Latin America and suggested that the economic expansion that he described in a number of countries is working fine. That is merely a surface impression gleaned from the economic journals that the hon. Gentleman reads. There are serious human rights abuses in a number of those countries, as well as enormous problems of poverty and, indeed, the impoverishment of the poorest people in those countries.

The way in which the World bank and the International Monetary Fund have promoted privatisation projects and structural adjustment programmes is deeply regrettable. In many ways, such programmes pose a threat to the democracy that those organisations purport to support. British companies are making a great deal of money out of those privatisations.

Many of us look askance at the behaviour of British Gas. At the time of its privatisation it was sold cheap to shareholders, and it is now using the resulting enormous profits that it has made from share dealings in this country to invest in privatisation programmes in other countries. I find that deplorable, because Latin America needs long-term investment in infrastructure development and, above all, support to develop and improve public services, particularly education and health.

There has not been a vast increase in expenditure on education and health in some of the countries mentioned by the hon. Member for Gravesham. Indeed, the structural adjustment programmes adopted in many of them have led to cuts in public expenditure as a result of the combination of privatisation and the closure of a number of public service projects. That is a serious matter.

During the summer, I had the pleasure of meeting Hector Villamil, a member of the Ecuadorean Parliament, who was elected in May as a representative of an environmental party and represents part of the Ecuadorean Amazon region. He was on a lecture tour in this country, and when he visited my home we had a long discussion about what is happening in Ecuador. He described how oil companies, mostly owned by the United States, have been given enormous franchises for the Ecuadorean Amazon region and the problems that that has caused.

Hector's party has circulated a paper describing the problems that have arisen since those companies commenced oil drilling in the Amazon region. It states:

"Since then, oil drilling has left an indelible mark on the Ecuadorean Amazon: untreated toxic wastes have been dumped in the rainforest, rivers and soils have been contaminated, trees have been cut down and wildlife destroyed. Oil drilling has also seriously disrupted the lives of indigenous communities in this remote region by damaging natural resources they use for nutritional, medicinal, domestic . . . religious and recreational purposes. The oil companies' invasion of traditional territories has dislocated and dispossessed entire ethnic groups (such as the Cofan and Tagaeri). Oil pollution has also affected the health of local inhabitants, with increased incidences of skin rashes, fevers, headaches, malnutrition, and miscarriages."

Crucially, that paper goes on to report:

"Little, if any, of the wealth generated by oil has found its way back to these communities."

Hector was here in part to promote a book describing what is known as the "green guerrilla process" and recounts how the poorest people in the poorest regions of many Latin American countries are incensed by the activities of multinational corporations, some of which are based in this country. Those corporations are in the process of rapidly extracting oil and other minerals from the ground, but they pay scant or no regard to the needs of the people in those communities and the long-term damage caused to them.

One can understand the outrage and anger felt by those people when they see enormous wealth being made from their communities and none of it being fed back to them. Despite the vast profits made from those regions, those people still suffer high levels of infant mortality, a low life expectancy, poor education and almost non-existent health services. Moreover, the environmental destruction in Ecuador is not an isolated incident: one can see the same effects in Colombia and Venezuela and particularly in Peru and Bolivia.

On Sunday, Nicaraguans go to the polls for the first round of their elections—obviously, we do not know the final outcome. The programmes that the Chamorro Government have agreed with the IMF and the World bank have caused high levels of unemployment and massive privatisation. That has led to an increase in poverty and violence. Arms that were provided either to the Sandinista army or to the Contras during the Contra war are now in the hands of people who are either struggling to survive or who intend to use them for criminal purposes. The poison of the war waged by the United States against the Nicaraguan people in the late 1970s and the early 1980s is still with us. Those of us who saw "Newsnight" will be aware of the report about CIA sales of crack within the United States. That, too, emanates from the poison of that conflict.

It is interesting to note that, whatever the result of the election, the structural adjustment programme strategy of the IMF and the World bank will pertain. The national Government will have little power to alter it because those organisations have made it clear that they reached an agreement with the Chamorro Government, and that that agreement must stick.

Those who support the structural adjustment programmes which have led to the privatisation of utilities and state-owned enterprises and are opposed to land reform and all that goes with it should recognise that they are storing up enormous problems for the future. The rising in the Chiapas region of Mexico mirrored the activities of the Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional in El Salvador and the Sandinista in Nicaragua, who responded to the impoverishment experienced in the 1960s and 1970s and the denial of democracy. We are storing up exactly the same problems for the future and this time British multinationals are as much involved as anyone else. We cannot just ignore those facts—we must bear some responsibility for them.

For many years many of us have been deeply concerned, if not appalled, at the human rights record of Haiti. It is important to put on record that the successive Duvalier Governments were cited in common parlance around the world as an example of a Government who destroyed human rights and lived entirely by the power of the secret police and the threat that they posed. It is difficult to say exactly which is the poorest country in the world, but Haiti, unfortunately, is certainly one of the poorest.

At least a mass popular movement and protest succeeded in getting rid of the Duvaliers. Since then, the Haitian Governments have looked to countries that espouse

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

democracy for support and aid to develop an education system, a health service and all the other connected essential public services, but they have looked in vain. Instead, that country has been visited by representatives from Washington and the World bank. A structural adjustment programme has been introduced that has privatised the publicly owned services and industries, such as they were. Above all, however, that programme means that Haiti is used as a source of cheap labour for United States-owned multinationals. That is the US strategy.

Sir Kenneth Carlisle *rose—*

Mr. Corbyn: I will not give way, as I want to conclude soon.

Multinational corporations, acting through a trading arrangement promoted by the US, intend to use the Caribbean basin and central America as a source of cheap labour. That policy will cause a huge conflict in the future. There could be competition between workers in the United States and workers in that region. However, a conference of trade unions in the United States this summer—which I attended—was told that people employed by the same multinationals on either side of the border are getting together because they believe that unity and not competition in low wages is the way forward.

Sir Kenneth Carlisle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Corbyn: No, I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman has plenty of time to make a speech, so he need not worry.

When the Minister replies, I hope that he will deal with the concerns of many human rights organisations about the position in Guatemala, the training of the Guatemalan military and the supply of equipment by Britain to Guatemala. Although on the surface things have changed somewhat, as they have in many countries—Governments have changed and there are now some democratic opportunities—beneath the surface the same secret police, the same oppressive armies and the same people who abused human rights for so long still have substantial power. There is much concern about the fact that we are involved in training the Guatemalan military, which has an appalling human rights record—it is almost second to none in the continent. I do not believe that we should have such involvement.

We have an important role to play in supporting human rights and the democratic agenda in Latin America. If we promote an economic strategy which increases the gap between rich and poor, creates vast shanty towns, destroys people's environments and livelihoods, we are storing up enormous troubles for the future. The poorest people in that region will not sit idly by and watch their oil and other minerals being exploited by foreign multinationals while none of the benefits ever trickle down to those impoverished rural communities.

11.31 am

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): We are participating in what has become a happy tradition in the House of Commons. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) has to leave us, but I understand why. He has become part of that tradition, which is to remind all of us present, and anyone who cares to read the record of the debate, where the soul of the Labour party still lies and how unreconstructed and resolutely backward-looking most of it is.

I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman has participated in all nine debates, but for many years he has given the same performance as he gave this morning, which is to look resolutely backwards to the problems and ills of the 1970s, and even of the 1960s, and to talk about the dreadful threat of the multinationals. That shows his failure to understand the benefits of free-market economics, which almost everyone in the world save this last redoubt in the British Labour party has come to understand. The hon. Gentleman's contribution was comforting, because we can now feel at home again. I hope that the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) will try to take his party a little further forward—if he cannot make 1996, perhaps he can at least get to the 1980s and take us out of the 1960s, where his hon. Friend left us.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) not only on initiating this ninth debate, but on his indefatigable contribution to the causes of British parliamentary links with Latin America at all levels. Those of us who know what he does will warmly support my remarks.

As my hon. Friend said, this debate has become an annual fixture, so the perspective inevitably changes. Last year, we were still in the shadow of the Mexican currency and political crisis and its impact on Mexico and the rest of Latin America. Happily, the 12 months since then have been good economically for Latin America—we always have the problem of not being able to itemise each country but having to speak about them as a generality. Solid progress has been made in the economic sphere, especially in the southern cone countries. We are all extremely thankful for that.

The free-market philosophy, which Opposition Members find so difficult to swallow, has continually proved its effectiveness. Although there are problems, to which I shall refer later, there has undoubtedly been a trickle-down effect. The *Financial Times* of 25 March 1996 contained an interesting statistic that caught my eye. The article referred to the better diet of the poor in Brazil, and stated that 17 per cent. more chickens were consumed in 1995 than in 1994. That statistic may be of interest to the hon. Member for Islington, North, who is worried about the trickle-down effect. More must be done, but the trend is in the right direction.

The privatisation process has been tremendous. The most recent figures that I have seen show that, in the five years from 1990 to 1995, no fewer than 645 state corporations throughout the countries of Latin America were brought into the private sector. Much of that transition was based on experience in this country. Many experts from Britain went to Latin America to assist, and made an important contribution to that process.

Most Latin American countries have conducted economic stabilisation policies that have achieved significant success. Legendary inflation rates—we all talked about the banana republics of Latin America with their 500 per cent. or 1,000 per cent. inflation—are on their way out. In Brazil, the inflation rate in 1994 was 92 per cent., but in 1995 it was reduced to 22 per cent.

It is still high, but the figures are going in the right direction, as they are in virtually every country in Latin America. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham said, every country is still exposed to certain pressures and dangers. The export earnings of [illegible] America increased last year by 20 per cent., and investment flows were estimated at $18 billion, which held up on the figure for the previous year. All that is very good news.

Growth in 1995 was only 0.3 per cent.—it was seriously affected by what had happened in Mexico—but this year it is 10 times that—about 3 per cent.—4 per cent. is forecast for 1997, and still greater growth is predicted for the year after. Economic progress is greatly to be welcomed and applauded.

Economic co-operation between the countries of Latin America has made significant progress. Those of us who have been connected with Latin America over the years will recall the many efforts made to establish regional co-operation that were not successful, and which gently trickled into the sand or into the pending trays of one or two diplomats. Now, there are two well-established organisations—the North American Free Trade Agreement and Mercosur—and we have every reason to believe that they will be successful.

What happened in Mexico has put a slight check on NAFTA's development, and the devaluation of the Mexican peso has changed the balance and the issues involved for the United States and Canada, but NAFTA is here to stay, whatever the trend. However, Mercosur is a story of considerable success. A recent forecast suggests that the links that Chile has developed will create

"a market of 220m people with a combined GDP of nearly $1 trillion and total trade of $175 billion. That makes it a . . . powerful . . . counterpoint to NAFTA"

and is very significant for the European Union. My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham mentioned the development of links between our country and the European Union and the Mercosur countries. I welcome that process.

With the forthcoming addition of Bolivia, and perhaps of other countries, Mercosur will become increasingly important. Those of us who believe in free trade hope that it will develop throughout Latin America, that links between the European Union and the whole of Latin America will be enhanced, and that we will increase collaboration and not develop into two antagonistic trading blocs. Britain has a very significant role to play in developing that collaboration.

We all applaud the fact that, despite problems here and there, there is political stability. In three or four countries, there is a new tendency for presidents to become eligible for second terms. Some people regard that as a dangerous step, but it is to be welcomed within proper democratic limits because it gives stability and coherence. We should not forget that Latin America has had a turbulent political, military interventionist history since the second world war, and we should not take for granted the democratic stability that it has achieved. It needs to be further developed and entrenched by allowing presidents second terms.

That constitutional stability has been achieved at a time when many—probably all—Latin American countries have been obliged to institute tough economic stability regimes. As we know in this country and across the channel, tough measures of economic restoration carry with them political pressures and dangers; many Latin America leaders have successfully faced up to those pressures.

The threat of military intervention, to which we had grown accustomed in Latin American countries, did not materialise. The only example—the threat of General Oviedo in Paraguay to President Wasmosy—failed. Pressures from other Latin American countries and strength in Paraguay ensured that General Oviedo and all the other military leaders in the continent are back in barracks and, pray God, will stay there to do the job that they are meant to do instead of intervening in the political process.

The political stability that Latin American countries have achieved has enabled them, in their growing self-confidence, to play a much more justified role on the world stage. Brazil has strong ambitions for a permanent seat on the Security Council of the United Nations. Argentina makes important contributions to the United Nations' activities. That emphasises the fact that the United Kingdom Government must take Latin American countries extremely seriously—strategically, diplomatically, politically, economically and commercially—as I expect they do.

That is not to say that the countries of Latin America are without problems. It would be strange if they were. The strong personal presidential focus that occurs in so many countries poses dangers. The problems of the caudillo, which are traditional in Latin American countries, must be avoided. It is important that they create the democratic concept of a loyal and established opposition, with a democratic transfer of power from one group of politicians to another without upheaval. In each country, the concept of what we would describe in Britain as traditional political parties must be strengthened. There should not be a clique in the capital, wheeling and dealing for its own benefit. Progress is chequered, not uniform, but it is being made.

Progress is also being made in developing governmental and bureaucratic structures—education, health and all those things that people in many countries may take for granted—although there are problems. The infrastructure in many Latin American countries needs to be enhanced.

Many Latin American leaders admit that the gap between rich and poor is a growing problem, and I agree with the hon. Member for Islington, North that Latin American politicians must tackle it. Although I believe that the statistics prove that, in general, the trickle-down effect is working, there are some worrying data about the very rich in Latin America. The latest figures I have show that

"There are 35 dollar-billionaires in Latin America, according to Forbes"

magazine, of whom 15 come from Mexico. Although I have no objection to the accumulation of wealth in principle, that problem deserves serious attention in countries where there are the social problems of which we are aware and the linked problems of corruption and drugs. I shall not repeat the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham.

The existence of such problems must not be allowed to obscure the great progress that has been made and the potential that continues to be developed in Latin America. That brings us back to the United Kingdom and to what Her Majesty's Government should do.

[Mr. Ray Whitney]

For more than a quarter of a century, I have been involved, on and off, with efforts to make the British public—especially the British business community—aware of the potential of Latin America. Many are the initiatives that British Governments have taken and continue to take. It is time for a further renewed effort, especially—as I have said several times—in the regions of the United Kingdom. There is much knowledge in London, especially the City, about what happens in Latin America. Many of our old-established enterprises—trading houses and so on—in Latin America do very well, but in my opinion they tend to get on with it quietly and do it themselves.

We must make further efforts to ensure that medium-sized companies throughout the United Kingdom do not become fixated on, for example, the Asian tigers and think that Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Caracas, Buenos Aires and Santiago are strange places with funny generals in funny hats and unstable regimes. All hon. Members know that that is far from the truth. The reality is much more encouraging, but we must make further efforts to get that information across. I hope that all of us do what we can as Members of Parliament to further that campaign, but we look to the Government for a lead. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to reassure all of us that the ambition to spread an awareness of the opportunities in Latin America is shared by Her Majesty's Government.

11.50 am

Sir Kenneth Carlisle (Lincoln): I am delighted to take part in this annual debate. I add my thanks and congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), not only for organising this yearly debate, but for everything else he does during the year to promote our good relations with Latin America. I have great respect for his activities in that regard.

I am delighted that our relations with Latin America have improved so much. All of us who love that part of the world can only take pleasure from the fact that our trade with that area is growing, that our links with the people are ever more active and that we appear to be moving on a strong upward curve toward re-establishing our historic links with those countries. That is undoubtedly occurring because free trade and firmly based democracy are now dominant in Latin America.

I am especially interested in watching the development of Mercosur. In my intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham, I mentioned the stimulating effect on investment, free trade and the growth of jobs that that development has had over the past five or six years. Investment into the whole region is impressive and I am delighted that the United Kingdom is at the forefront of that effort.

As we all know, substantial UK companies such as British Gas, our water companies, British Petroleum and other oil companies, are now operating in Argentina and other countries. We are also investing in manufacturing in telecommunications. That is mirrored by the huge interest and activity of the financial services sector. Only a week or two ago, I visited a merchant bank in the City that had realised that it had to get back into South America because all its rivals were setting up offices there. Such activity promotes not only businesses that are already established and growing, but the skills that we can offer—for example, our experience in privatisation ensures that our aid and advice on that subject are second to none.

The scene is one of growing activity and encouragement. We all have an interest, therefore, in the continuing stability and growth of Latin American economies. It is not easy for countries to achieve those aims. For example, the value of the Argentine currency is high and unemployment is great. We must try to ensure that growth continues at the level that is needed to cut unemployment. Stability, democracy and inward investment are essential in that effort.

I strongly echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) about opportunities for this country. Although many of our major companies are active in Latin America, we need to spread the word to get middle-ranking companies involved to a much greater extent. I am always impressed by figures showing that our investment is, I believe, the second largest in Latin America—it certainly is in Argentina—but our exports are not as high in the league. We need the involvement of smaller companies if we are to do better.

We can help Argentina to face its current unemployment problems by investing in growth, but we should also support President Menem's courageous efforts to address the structural inflexibilities in Argentina's labour market. That is a difficult long-term problem and President Menem is trying to get the unions to address practically the requirements of modern economies. We wish him well in that brave effort.

In general, our relations with South America are encouraging. One of the most interesting aspects of free trade and economic stability is their effect on democracy. I tried to intervene on the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) to make that point, but he was determined not to listen. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe said, the example of Paraguay, where the threat to democracy was overcome by pressure from neighbours, is a tremendous tribute to what can be achieved by free trade and large areas of economic co-operation. Everyone in Paraguay knew that, if a dictatorship were re-established, the country would have to leave Mercosur and all the advantages that that brought. In that part of South America, free trade and democracy go hand in hand.

My hon. Friends and I are adamant that we should seek to ensure that the European Union is generous and open with Mercosur. We do not want trading blocs to raise tariffs against each other. This country's reputation for supporting free trade should lead us to ensure that barriers between trading blocs continue to fall. It is of the greatest importance that our Government should pursue that aim over the next two years.

Before ending, I should mention the continuing difficulties associated with finding a long-term solution to the questions surrounding the Falkland Islands. I know that both the British and Argentine Governments are working hard to develop co-operation in matters such as oil exploration and fishing. We must work hard to find practical solutions. We must be tolerant. We must work hard to get the support of the peoples of both countries and make them see that the long-term solution to the problem is real co-operation and ever closer links. In the end, that is the only solution.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. Next week, I shall have the great privilege of going with a party to Argentina to take part in the British-Argentine conference. The hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) was to have accompanied us, but I am sorry to say that he will no longer be coming. Such conferences are an example of how the exchange of ideas and people can lead to better understanding and they help to ensure that our links with that important and delightful part of the world will continue to strengthen.

11.58 am

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): I join in the congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) on initiating the debate. I have a warm regard for his close involvement in Latin America and his great knowledge of that region.

I have had the privilege of visiting Argentina and Brazil with the Trade and Industry Committee. In previous years, I visited Venezuela and, this year, I visited Colombia, Ecuador and Peru privately. On all those occasions, I found that there was a strong sense of this country's historic links, which go back centuries, with countries in that part of the world. I was enormously impressed by the landscape and the stunning beauty of the countries that I visited, and I think that they offer a huge opportunity for people to see something quite different from our civilisation.

I should like to concentrate my remarks on Peru. I do not think that anyone doubts that the economic progress made in that country in the past six years is anything short of stunning. In 1990, it had an inflation rate of 36,000 per cent.—which is extreme hyper-inflation. The inflation rate is now below 15 per cent., and it may even be below 10 per cent., which is a huge tribute to the economic management of that country. President Fujimori has done a remarkably good job in Peru, and has laid down the foundation for steady growth. We are now exporting ever more goods to that country, and we have very considerable opportunities for foreign investment and for building a sure economic connection with it.

The foundation of that growth has been the privatisation of some manufacturing and of the telecommunications, mining, banking, transportation and energy sectors. There is no doubt that the work that has been done in privatisation in the United Kingdom has had an enormous effect worldwide and that it is being copied. There is also no doubt that the success of the economy in Peru is nothing short of miraculous and that it is due, in part if not in the main, to their privatisation policies. Domestic investment there has grown, and our exports to that country are rising considerably.

There have been ministerial visits to Peru—which I know have been warmly appreciated—including that by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, who was there only a few weeks ago, following an earlier visit. I recall vividly his description of his visit to Machu Picchu, which was recounted at a lunch he hosted for a Peruvian delegation to the United Kingdom. That description played a part in convincing me of the importance of visiting that quite remarkable place, which is one of the world's greatest wonders. I shall never forget the visit I made there earlier this year with my wife and daughter.

Peru is not without its problems—it is in considerable debt to international banks and the international finance community. In the light of Peru's terrific economic progress, and in recognition of its poverty—such as exists in a great many Latin American countries—I hope that we will give careful consideration to recycling and alleviating some of its debt. We have an obligation to do what we can to help in the provision of education and health services.

I know that our Minister for Overseas Development is acutely aware of the work that is being done by the British Council, and particularly by the Overseas Development Administration, to deal with the problems that I have outlined in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and elsewhere. I think that we do very well in providing aid, considering the restrictions that have had to be placed on our budget.

I believe that there are substantial opportunities for British companies to go out to Latin America, particularly to countries such as Brazil, Argentina and Peru that have shown that they have dealt with their economic problems and have laid the foundations for stability, which will give us opportunities for greater trade and closer links with them. I know that all hon. Members would welcome that.

12.3 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): I join other hon. Members in welcoming this annual debate. I know that the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) arranged the debate to coincide with the visit of President Frei to Great Britain, which is a very important event in cementing relations between Chile and Great Britain. More generally, however, this debate is a symbol of the importance of Latin America to us because of trade and the role in world affairs that we seek to play with our partners in Latin America.

The growth of interest in Latin American affairs in the House is very welcome. We have had a visit not only by President Frei but, earlier this year, by President Zedillo. President Cardosa will, we hope, visit Great Britain early next year. I regret that I shall not be able to take part in the visit to Argentina next week, but that visit is significant. The Trade and Industry Select Committee's report on Brazil and Argentina last year, and this year's examination by the Foreign Affairs Select Committee of Latin American affairs demonstrate the increasing importance of relations with Latin America to the House and to the political system in Great Britain.

I must, however, introduce a note of controversy. We must examine some aspects of our relations with Latin America and of our failure to maximise those relations. I do not want to arbitrate between my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney), but it is desperately important that we do not have a one-sided emphasise on relations with Latin America. Important though they are, we do not have only trade relations with Latin America; it is also important to recognise the need for economic progress and eradication of poverty there. Those matters are fundamental if we are to achieve political stability in Latin America, which all hon. Members desire.

We have a vested interest in political stability in Latin America because poverty and the corruption that sometimes feeds on poverty allow the widescale development of the drugs industry, as has been mentioned by hon. Members in this debate. The hon. Member for Gravesham is right: demand for drugs in countries such as Great Britain, and even more so in the United States, fuels the drug trade in parts of Latin America, where it is an endemic and deep-rooted problem. We cannot separate those issues.

[Mr. Tony Lloyd]

The issue of economic progress is important, but it must be linked to building democracy and developing an active policy on human rights in Latin America. If we are to co-operate effectively in the spheres of drug control and eradication, we must consider all the issues.

The hon. Member for Gravesham has already mentioned the importance of Latin America and the growth of Mercosur. This month, Chile acceded to associate status in Mercosur and, early next year, Bolivia will achieve the same status. Mercosur is developing rapidly. I was recently in Venezuela, and the Venezuelans told me that they also are keen to enter negotiations to accede to Mercosur.

The hon. Member for Wycombe made the important point that trading blocs—of which Mercosur is now the third largest—must not develop as competitive and rival blocs. It is desperately important for Great Britain and for the European Union that we use our role to ensure that the European Union opens up a wide relationship with Mercosur and with Latin America, because the alternative—which needs to be spelled out—is economic hegemony by north America, and particularly by the United States.

I do not say that with any sense of aggression towards the United States, as it is and will continue to be among our most important political and economic contacts in the world. We must recognise, however, that we have to ensure that Latin America, and particularly Mercosur, can count on Great Britain, within Europe, to keep open world trade. We must also ensure that we keep open our access to Latin America, and that we give Latin America an alternative to the free trade areas of America as the only outlet for trade in that region. That will be good for Britain, good for Latin America and, in the long run, good for the world.

Despite the importance of Latin America and the warm words that we have heard, Britain performs relatively badly in Latin America, if we compare our trade performance with that of other comparable European countries. In virtually every country in Latin America, Britain performs worse than Italy, much worse than Germany and in most cases worse than France. That is a long-term phenomenon, but the situation is not improving. In 1994 and 1995, Britain's share of world exports to Latin America dropped. In fairness, that should be seen in the context of the rising tide of trade; nevertheless, we are slipping behind the countries that I mentioned.

Is it still the Government's view that we can double our share of trade? We ought to aim for that target. Is the benchmark of the year 2000 realistic? Many people have pointed out to me that, until we examine why we do so badly, we will not be able to rectify the problems. Other hon. Members have identified various relevant factors, but I should like to suggest one or two further respects in which the Government are not playing their role as we would wish.

For example, some 30,000 young people in Britain are studying French at GCSE level, whereas the number taking Spanish is little more than 4,000, and fewer than 200 are taking Portuguese. We should have begun to examine such statistics 30 years ago when we started to develop an interest in Latin America. The time is long overdue for us to rectify that problem.

The BBC World Service is widely respected throughout Latin America. Why is the BBC world television service not beamed into all parts of Latin America as it should be? I am told that there are plans to close down the Brazilian service of the World Service. Perhaps the Minister can tell us whether the matter has been resolved, as it would be outrageous if that happened. I hope that other hon. Members would support that statement.

On the staffing of British diplomatic missions in the region, the Minister took part in a debate with the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, to which he said:

"I think that the Foreign Office is under-funded".

I hope that we will hear more such candour on the Floor of the House today as he rightly berates his Treasury colleagues. The memorandum that he sent to the Select Committee demonstrates that staffing levels in our embassies throughout the region are well below those of the embassies of France, Italy and possibly Germany. There have been recent increases, but the staffing of our embassies has been cut significantly over the past few years. Government rhetoric points us in one direction, but reality points us in another. I hope that we shall receive assurance this morning that the weaknesses will be examined and rectified.

Economic development is a necessary partner to the development of human rights and democracy building. Democracy and human rights are not a bolt-on extra to the debate. It is disappointing that the Minister's submission to the Select Committee contained only three short paragraphs on human rights. On the human rights clauses in European Union treaties with Latin America, he said:

"There was a concern but we have helped to allay it that this was somehow picking off the Latin American countries as being in need of human rights clauses. However, it is a universal clause in all EU trade treaties of this kind and therefore we managed to placate the Latin American sensitivities on that subject."

There is no question of sensitivities. We should be actively supporting the many people in Latin America who want strong democracy and who want to build societies in which human rights are taken for granted, not seen as extraordinary.

Latin America will not introduce democracy and better human rights as a result of bullying by Britain or other countries. It has not done so in the past and will not do so now. We should state, and a Labour Government will state, that we will work with Latin American Governments and people to build the institutions, particularly the legal and judicial systems, that will give proper recourse against those who perpetrate abuses against the civilian population. That still exists on a wide scale, but this is not the time to discuss individual countries and cases.

There are many countries in which the existence of a notionally democratically elected president does not guarantee individual liberty, and certainly does not guarantee that other institutions, especially the military, have been conclusively taken out of the political system. We should say—as a Labour Government will say—that we want to work with democratic forces in Latin America and that we will pursue a policy actively supporting democrats and discouraging perpetrators of abuses against the civilian population.

The new Guatemalan ambassador is being introduced today at Buckingham palace and the Court of St. James. Having long taken an interest in that country, I welcome

the recent ceasefire and movements towards a conclusion of the problems in that sad country. Those movements are a beacon and an example of satisfactory developments on the continent.

We do no justice to our democratic traditions if our relationships are determined solely by narrow economic interests. We have a broader interest to exercise on that continent. We are greatly respected there. We should not overplay our hand or think that our role is greater than it is, but people and Governments in Latin America want Britain to play a constructive role in trade and equally in the development of strong democracy and strong human rights.

12.16 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor): I add my voice to those of other hon. Members who have congratulated my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) on his now annual routine of introducing this debate. It is a useful opportunity for us to review the relationship between our country and Latin American countries.

Latin America is one of the most exciting parts of the world and one with which we can develop a close and worthwhile relationship, not only—as the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) said—in respect of human rights and human rights abuses and so that we can together act on the international stage through the United Nations and other forums to our mutual advantage, but to build British-Latin American trade. As I said, this debate is a welcome opportunity to deal with such matters. I am sorry that I have so little time in which to respond, but I shall do my best to deal at least with the main issues that have been raised today.

When we last debated Latin America a year ago, the United Kingdom had just become a permanent observer of the Organisation of American States and the European Union was about to sign the agreement with Mercosur, which my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Sir K. Carlisle) so rightly welcomed. That is a good step towards developing European trade generally in Latin America, and I think that, over the years, it will prove to be a constructive base on which to build.

Links with Latin America have been strengthened considerably since then. There has been much promotion of our interests in the region and special emphasis has been put on trade and investment in pursuit of the joint Department of Trade and Industry-Foreign and Commonwealth Office Link into Latin America trade campaign. The House will be aware of the conference that we are planning for January. I think that it will take that notion forward and provide a foundation on which we can build.

We have built a political dialogue with Latin America on global issues, involving the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation in particular. We also play a leading part in assisting Latin American countries to fight the evil drugs trade. In addition, we assist in fighting crime and terrorism and we take action in support of human rights and the environment. In all these regards, the British Government are taking a lead, which I am sure will be welcomed by all hon. Members.

There has been a good deal of progress on democracy in the region and I am glad that we have been able to watch closely the elections in Argentina and in Peru. There have also been presidential and congressional elections in Guatemala, which were observed by the Organisation of American States and the European Union, and which were widely acclaimed as being free and fair. There were presidential elections in Ecuador and the Dominican Republic and municipal elections in Argentina and Brazil.

Nicaragua's second presidential, general and municipal elections take place next Sunday. The absence of violence in the campaign is encouraging and, all in all, the strides that have been taken in Latin America towards democracy, in fighting the human rights abuses which we all abhor and in trying to combat the drugs trade and the increasing trend of criminal violence, as opposed to political violence, are to be widely welcomed.

There have been many ministerial visits to that part of the world this year. I will not go through them except to say that there have been, in all, 36 UK ministerial visits to Latin America and that 30 Latin American Ministers have visited the United Kingdom. Our particular pleasure in welcoming President Frei this week demonstrates the mutual warmth and closeness of our relationship with Chile. That country is developing extremely fast; it is one of the fastest growing economies in the western hemisphere, and the opportunities for British business and the EU-Chile framework co-operation agreement signed at the European Council meeting in June in Florence show the advances being made and the closeness of our relationship with that country.

We signed three agreements with Chile during President Frei's visit: a memorandum of understanding between the Ministries of Defence, an agreement between the British Council and the Chilean Ministry of Education and an agreement between our Securities and Investments Board and its Chilean counterpart. All those agreements are extremely welcome.

We are trying to deal with the long-standing and vexed problem of the tax on Scotch whisky. I believe that some progress, although not the progress that we would like, has been made on that front. The taxation regime on an extremely important export to the region should be relaxed. As I have said, it has not yet been relaxed quite as far as we would like.

Great progress is being made in our relationship with Argentina, building on the 1989 agreement whereby we have put the Falklands sovereignty issue aside and have gone forward as far and as fast as we can in building good bilateral relations in all other spheres. We have made some progress in attempting to reach a long-term fisheries agreement with Argentina; that is high on our agenda for the coming year. I hope that, next time we have a debate on this subject, we shall be able to report that we have made a breakthrough on that front.

We have, of course, had great success in the joint declaration on hydrocarbons which took place in September last year. The first round of licences is due to be announced shortly by the Falkland Islands Government. There is every sign of co-operation with Argentina on that front and I am pleased by that.

The success of Brazil's Real plan this year has been marked. The inflation forecast is 12 per cent. for this year which is a remarkable achievement as, two years ago, the monthly inflation rate was 50 per cent. The economy is stabilising, and the well-being of the Brazilian people has been largely improved. Brazil is a huge market; it has a

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population of more than 159 million people. It is extremely important that we take every advantage we can find to encourage British business to operate there.

The main threat to Brazilian progress is the delay or dilution that may occur in their key structural reforms. We will keep a close eye on that. President Cardoso has much to achieve. The economy will have to move forward quite fast if he is not to lose the momentum which has begun.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) mentioned Peru; I need do no more than endorse warmly everything he said. Peru has also benefited from doing a Brady deal on the outstanding debt with many banks and has received a lot of help from the Paris Club. We have been able to assist Peru in both areas, and it is making substantial and welcome progress.

I visited Peru briefly last year and then went on to Colombia. The continuing political crisis in Colombia remains a dominant problem and President Samper faces an enormous range of political and economic problems. His difficult relationship with the United States is not a help. The recent upsurge in guerrilla violence rather upstages his successes against the cartels. I am afraid that narco-trafficking and the link between the guerrillas and the drug barons remain serious concerns to all of us.

Our Government's position is that we wish to continue to help. We give a great deal of help to Colombia in terms of its fight against drugs and we will continue to do so. We encourage British business men to do business with Colombia and we will continue to do so, as long as that Government maintain the fight against drugs to our satisfaction. At the moment, I am confident that they are taking great steps to try to deal with that problem.

In May this year, I went to Venezuela. There has been substantial economic improvement there. Since my visit, the International Monetary Fund approved a $1.4 billion loan in July which will support the economic reform programme announced in April. That includes the complete lifting of foreign exchange controls, the freeing of interest rates, large rises in petrol prices—that was a brave move politically because, in the past, it has always been a source of great social friction—and increases in VAT and other taxes. The position in Venezuela is stabilising, and we can look forward to further progress in that country.

I would like to cover many other countries but, I am afraid, time is running out so I will limit myself to mentioning only Mexico. As has been mentioned, we welcomed President Zedillo to London at the beginning of this year. He and the Prime Minister signed a joint action plan to deepen our relations on a range of bilateral and global issues. I believe that our relationship with Mexico is extremely close. Liaison between the two countries is also effective in global terms, and the vexing question of Helms-Burton has led to substantial collaboration and co-operation between Mexico and ourselves in expressing our substantial dislike of the extra-territorial legislation that the United States has seen fit to put in place.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Minister give way?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I do not have time. The hon. Gentleman did not give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln. I have only four minutes left.

As the Mexican economy pulls out of the worst recession for many years, helped by the North American Free Trade Association and by Mexico's other free trade agreements, we want in every way we can to encourage the British business community to re-investigate the opportunities in Mexico particularly, as well as in other parts of Latin America.

I now turn to the general point of our economy and our business links with that part of the world. There are two elements: the first is trade and the second is investment. It is true that our trading links with Latin America are very much weaker than those with our main European competitors and much weaker than our Government would like them to be. We are doing everything we can to encourage those links. I talked about the Link into Latin America campaign. The Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign Office are joining forces to try to spread the word throughout the country, through the business links system, that there are huge opportunities for British companies to trade in Latin America.

I take the point made by the hon. Member for Stretford about learning of the Spanish language, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment is concerned about that and is looking at ways in which we can encourage more people to learn Spanish. I did not know that only 200 people were learning Portuguese. That presents a mammoth challenge if we are to improve the situation substantially enough to affect our trade with Brazil.

The investment picture is much happier, as hon. Members will know. We are the largest European investor in Latin America and we are the third largest global investor in Latin America. That tells us that our very large companies are fully involved in Latin American business. We now need to concentrate on encouraging medium and perhaps even small companies to take advantage of the huge range of opportunities throughout Latin America.

The hon. Member for Stretford also mentioned what I told the Select Committee. Perhaps he should read all that I said and not just part of it. I pointed out that the Treasury has difficulty in matching its expenditure to its income and the Foreign Office, together with all Government Departments, expects to take its share of the hardship that goes with that. As our economy improves, I am sure that greater resources will be put our way, and when that happens, I shall make certain that a fair proportion is put towards our Latin American efforts.

Finally, I reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe that the Government and I share his enthusiasm for Latin America and his determination that our businesses take advantage of that market, and that Latin America and Britain are better off as a result.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. We must now move on to the next debate.

Children (Parental Contact)

12.30 pm

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): My purpose in requesting this debate is to highlight a serious problem that I believe has arisen in the operation of one aspect of the far-reaching, wide-ranging and generally positive comprehensive reforms that were introduced in the Children Act 1989 and that came into law in 1991. I intend to focus my remarks on section 8 orders, and the role of the courts in enforcing contact between the absent parent and the child living with the parent with care.

In our modern society, notions of the family have changed, and it is my belief that the law, and above all its interpretation by the predominantly elderly male judiciary, have not adjusted to take account of those changes. To quote Simon Jolly in the *Child and Family Law Quarterly* in 1995:

"The general principle is now well established that when a child is living with only one of its parents it is almost always in the interest of the child to have contact with his or her other parent."

No one disputes that it is almost always the case, but my contention is that, increasingly, the courts are taking matters further, and enforcing contact when it may not be in the interests of the child, the parent with care or the new family and siblings in that new family.

The Master of the Rolls, Sir Thomas Bingham, is quoted in the same publication as saying:

"The courts should not at all readily accept that the child's welfare will be injured by direct contact. Judging that question, the court should take a medium-term and long-term view of the child's development and not accord excessive weight to what appear to be likely to be short-term or transient problems. Neither parent should be encouraged or permitted to think that the more intransigent, the more unreasonable, the more obdurate and the more unco-operative they are, the more likely they are to get their own way."

That may be a theoretical position, but how do we measure short-term costs and long-term benefits when we are talking about young children and their parents? Does that approach deal with the real world and all its complexities?

The real world is a very complex place. In Britain, one in three of all marriages end in divorce. Each year, about 250,000 children see their parents divorce. One in three marriages is a remarriage, and one in three births is to parents who are not married. There are 1.5 million one-parent families, and 2.5 million dependent children. Half the dependent children in one-parent families have part-time step-families because one of their birth parents has a new relationship. One in 12 dependent children live in step-families, and more than half full-time step-families have a new baby brother or sister.

I was concerned by reports in the press about separated parents killing themselves and their children. There were also reports of difficulties over contact arrangements, so I decided to ask some parliamentary questions and to seek some information from Ministers about the monitoring of an issue that potentially affects a large number of parents, children, step-parents and siblings. Earlier this year, I tabled a variety of questions to different Ministers, and I should like to refer to some of the answers that I received.

I asked the then Health Minister, now the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), the following question:

"(1) how many children have been *(a)* placed in the care of local authorities, *(b)* placed in the care of the other parent and *(c)* cared for by a step parent or partner following the imprisonment of a parent with care in each year since 1991 as a result of contempt of court for non-compliance with a court order under section 8 of the Children Act 1989;

(2) how many incidents resulting in injuries to children had occurred during . . . contact".—[*Official Report*, 14 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. *602-3*.]

I received the answer that the information was not available centrally.

I asked the Lord Chancellor's Department

"how many contact orders have been made under section 8 of the Children Act 1989 where the presiding judge had been aware that one parent had been charged with, or convicted of assaulting the other parent."—[*Official Report*, 16 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. *718*.]

I was told that my question would be answered by the chief executive of the Court Service, who told me:

"the task of extracting what information might be available would be disproportionately costly in view of the volume of cases",

so he was unable to identify the cases but could give me only the overall figure. He told me that there were 106,911 contact orders made between October 1991 and September 1995. That did not answer my question.

I asked the Home Office

"how many convictions for assault had occurred as a result of incidents *(a)* prior to, *(b)* during and *(c)* after contact between parents whose children were subject to contact orders made under section 8 of the Children Act 1989 in each year since 1991."

The reply was:

"Information relating to the number of convictions for assault relating to incidents where contact orders were made . . . is not collected centrally."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. *702*.]

And so it continued. I received answers from the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Home Office and the Department of Health, but none of them said that they had the information.

I then asked whether the Government intended to monitor and collect information on those matters. I asked the Secretary of State for Health

"what information he collects centrally on the effects of the operation of section 8 orders".—[*Official Report*, 21 February 1996; Vol. 272, c. *163*.]

The answer was none. Once again, I was told that the information could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

When I asked about the most frequent pattern of contact between children and their absent parents, and what plans there were to carry out research on the impact of contact orders under section 8 on religious attendance by children at places of religious worship to illustrate that alternate weekends could be disruptive, I was told that there were no such plans. I therefore concluded that the Government were not monitoring the effects of an important Act, affecting so many young people and their parents.

Recently, there have been more reports about domestic violence and its consequences. A case reported in the press involved a woman, Dawn Austin, who has been gaoled for six weeks because she refused to comply with a court order under section 8 of the Children Act. She has

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been gaoled for contempt and her nine-year-old son and her four-year-old daughter have been placed in the care of strangers—they are with foster parents.

Is that sensible? It is not the first such occurrence, but it is alarming because the ex-partner of Miss Austin is a man who has a conviction for domestic violence in a previous relationship and has been imprisoned for it. Despite that history, the court decided to imprison the mother and take the children away and put them with foster parents—so much for priority being given to the welfare of the child.

A very important study that compared domestic violence and child contact arrangements in England with those in Denmark was published in June. At my request, it is being considered by the Lord Chancellor's Department. The study was conducted by Marianne Hester and Lorraine Radford, and makes compelling reading. They studied the cases of 53 women, whom they interviewed, and 120 children across a very wide age range were involved.

The women had had difficulties involving domestic violence, and the study was concerned with what had happened to them before and after the breakdown of the relationships and the involvement of the courts with regard to contact arrangements under section 8 of the Children Act. The conclusions should ring alarm bells for so many professionals, people in the legal profession and politicians.

The report concluded:

"Contact takes precedence over child welfare. The value of contact to the child was rarely questioned in the light of the father's abuse. Professionals involved in contact cases rarely challenged a man's use of violence. Many reinforced the perpetrator's distorted perception of responsibility by focusing solely on the mother's hostility to contact."

Under the heading "The abuse of women and children during contact visits", the report concluded:

"child contact gives fathers the ability to continue to abuse, harass and exert control over women and children."

It also said that there was an emphasis in the process on getting an agreement rather than an outcome that was necessarily practical or would help the children or the parent with care.

The report's authors highlighted the failure to protect the parent with care when the handover arrangements were made. It said:

"inadequate provisions were made to ensure the safety of women during mediation and on court or court welfare premises. Resources to protect women from further violence when taking or collecting children from contact visits were also extremely limited."

The report is very long, and although I do not have time to quote too much of it, its conclusions are worth considering. It says:

"At the time of the last interviews, almost one third of the women whose children had maintained contact said the children had recently been abused on contact visits with fathers (eight out of twenty-six)."

It says that the professionals in the court welfare service place an emphasis on contact with the father that overrides anything else:

"They had a strong commitment to the idea of maintaining contact for children with non-resident fathers, even where there had been child abuse and the children were afraid . . . emphasis has thus shifted away from the individual circumstances and needs of a particular child and the actual quality of the relationship with the father, to addressing the needs of a 'hypothetical child'."

There lies my point. We must consider the real situation of real children in the real world. Not every child fits into an idealised model, and not every family can easily accommodate children maintaining contact with the absent parent that is not to the detriment of the family and the parent with whom they live, or does not give rise to the potential for domestic violence.

Other serious concerns, which I do not have time to go into, were highlighted by the Children Act advisory committee's annual report for 1994-95. One of the many conclusions of that important report quotes the assessment of Judge Fricker that

"penal enforcement of contact orders is unlikely to be in the interests of the child and should not be encouraged as a punitive approach to non-compliance."

Mothers in this country who are in fear daily of contact arrangements also fear that the professionals will say, "If you don't comply, we will take the children away from you, the residence order will be given to the absent parent, and there will be other problems for you. We might even put you in gaol." We have seen that women can be gaoled under such circumstances.

I do not believe that, when Parliament adopted the Children Act, such outcomes were ever intended. There is a danger that the courts are reinterpreting the Act to the detriment of many children and their parents, and the Government need to reassert and make clear as quickly as possible that it is not their intention that the child's welfare is damaged by the imprisonment of the mother.

The situation could be eased if a commitment were given that, in cases of a record of domestic violence, there should be a presumption of no contact rather than contact before consideration of the matter. If we do not go down that road, serious problems will continue to cause great hardship and suffering to many women and children.

The Government must collect data, monitor the situation, respond positively to the recent studies and reports, and act to ensure that mothers are not separated from their children and children are not forced into foster homes for weeks at a time. What happens when the mother comes out of prison? Presumably the absent parent can apply for another court order, and the whole process can continue indefinitely. We must put a stop to this social problem that is being experienced by a minority of mothers.

12.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Simon Burns): It is two and a quarter years since I contributed to a debate. I am delighted that, having been in the enviable position over that time of delivering probably the most popular speech heard in the House—"That this House do now adjourn"—I have been able to forswear my Trappist vow of silence to take part in this debate.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) on choosing this important subject, and on drawing attention to the problems faced by families, women and children in this sensitive and often heart-rending issue. I also suspect that it is appropriate to discuss the Children Act 1989, since this week is the fifth anniversary of its implementation.

The Children Act is recognised as a most comprehensive piece of legislation, incorporating public and private law relating to children. It enshrines five main principles. First, the child's welfare is paramount—that is crucial. Secondly, children are best cared for by both parents wherever possible. Thirdly, the state and courts should intervene only where improvements will be made for the child. The fourth principle is that delay is generally not in the best interests of the child, and the fifth is that laws and procedures regarding children should be unified.

Section 1 of the Children Act sets out the principles that guide a court making decisions under the Act. The child's welfare is the paramount consideration when a court determines any question involving his or her upbringing. I cannot emphasise that enough. Thus other considerations, such as the feelings of the parents, or any questions of "fault", must assume secondary importance, except as they affect the child's welfare.

Section 8 orders comprise a flexible package of orders which should cater for any question that may arise about the welfare of the child, and provide practical solutions. The intention is to encourage parents to maintain their involvement in the child's life, and to avoid driving unnecessary wedges between them.

Four types of order were created under section 8—contact orders, prohibited steps orders, residence orders and specific issue orders. In addition, under section 1(5), the court must consider whether making an order would be better for the child than making no order at all. I think that it will be helpful to the hon. Gentleman if I briefly define section 8 orders.

A contact order means an order requiring the person with whom a child lives, or is to live, to allow the child to visit or stay with the person named in the contact order, or for that person and child to have contact with each other. Previous legislation on access orders was about having access to the child, whereas section 8 contact orders are designed to provide for the child to visit or stay with the person named in the order. In 1995, the number of contact orders made rose by 12 per cent. to just over 35,000.

A prohibited steps order means an order that no step that could be taken by a parent in meeting his parental responsibility for a child, and which is of a kind specified in the order, shall be taken by any person without the consent of the court. Its purpose is to impose a specific restriction on the exercise of responsibility by the parents—covering, for example, taking a child abroad for an extended holiday. In 1995, the number of such orders was just under 6,000.

A residence order means an order settling the arrangements to be made as to the person with whom a child is to live. The residence order was a new concept introduced by the Children Act to replace the custody order. It is more flexible, and it may accommodate various shared care arrangements. A person in whose favour a residence order is made will automatically obtain parental responsibility for the child, if he does not already have it.

However, a residence order confers parental responsibility on a non-parent only for as long as the order is in force. The intention is that both parents should feel that they have a continuing role to play in relation to their children. In 1995, the number of such orders was about 26,000.

A specific issue order means an order giving directions for the purpose of determining a specific question that has arisen, or that may arise, in connection with any aspect of parental responsibility for a child. An example might be the need for permission in respect of a particular medical condition, or of the choice of a school for the child. Both prohibited steps orders and specific issue orders are concerned with "single issues", and are modelled on wardship jurisdiction.

In each case, the question of what is in the child's best interests must be decided on the particular facts of that case. There is no question of a fixed policy of discrimination against one parent in favour of the other, or against certain classes of people as parents.

The reforms contained in the Children Act emphasise that principle, but also the fact that both parents have a continuing responsibility for their child and, generally, should have continuing involvement in the child's upbringing, even after a separation or divorce. The legislation provides a flexible system of orders intended to settle particular matters in a way that neither parent may upset, rather than to remove parental power and authority from one parent to confer sole power and authority on the other.

In most cases where the court is required to decide what is in the best interests of the child, it will order residence in favour of one parent and contact for the other. I do not find it surprising that in many cases it will be in the best interests of the child to have a settled home with the mother.

As the hon. Member said, an emerging problem of the 1990s is the role of the father in a changing society. Structural and economic changes in society have brought especial stresses and strains to family life. The hon. Gentleman has already mentioned the fact that there is a great deal of concern about fathers with a history of violence seeking contact with their children after the marriage or relationship has broken down.

The Government are committed to helping families to stay together, where that is possible and realistic, but they cannot make marriages or relationships work. If breakdown or divorce occur, it is of prime importance that children are protected, and that both parents can also receive support. However, I repeat that the interests of the child must be paramount.

In such situations, parents need to be fully aware that they have both rights and responsibilities in relation to their children. It is a sad fact of life today that almost half the fathers whose marriages or relationships break down lose contact with their children within three years of the event.

I know that the hon. Gentleman will be aware of recent articles in the press drawing attention to the problem. They have mentioned, for example, the support that Bob Geldof has recently given to the organisation Families Need Fathers.

The hon. Gentleman has drawn the attention of the House to the recent case in which a mother has been imprisoned for contempt of court. I repeat the fact that the imprisonment was for precisely that—contempt of court. The woman concerned would have had the opportunity to oppose the making of the contact order and to put all the relevant information before the court. The court, having weighed all the facts, decided to make the order despite the mother's objections. By refusing to comply with it,

[Mr. Simon Burns]

the woman put herself in contempt of court. It was the eighth time that that had happened, and the decision of the judge was upheld by the Court of Appeal.

We need to emphasise again and again that, as any parent should know, being a parent entails a long-term commitment. It is that continuity of parental responsibility that we emphasised in the Children Act. Relationship breakdown and divorce are traumatic events, for parents and children alike. The Exeter family study suggested that the health outcomes of children in reordered or single-parent families may be worse than for those in intact families. Continuing contact between a father and his children may have a positive effect on reducing some negative outcomes for children.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the findings of a study by Marianne Hester and Lorraine Radford entitled "Domestic Violence and Child Contact in England and Denmark", published earlier this year by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. In the short time available, I shall draw attention to the conclusions of that important in-depth study.

The researchers concluded that contact should not be presumed to be in the best interests of the child if there had been domestic violence to the mother. More attention should be given to ensuring the safety of the mothers and to assessing the needs and wishes of the individual child. That is in line with the ideas being promoted by various women's organisations working with domestic violence, most notably the Women's Aid Federation.

Although the study is small in scale, it has produced some worrying evidence about the effect on women and children of contact arrangements in cases where there has been domestic violence. It shows that professionals, especially legal professionals, need to become more aware of domestic violence and its impact on children.

With the Family Law Act 1996, which is due to come into effect in October 1997, we have taken several steps that will improve protection for women and children. I believe that that Act will reduce much of the hostility and antagonism that exists under the present system, because the changes will place less emphasis on the financial aspects and on fault in relation to marriage breakdown. Introducing a period for reflection and mediation will encourage greater thought to be given to the relationships between adults, and will help both parents to settle reasonably their future relationships with their children.

On the question of the monitoring of contact orders, it is important to refer to the Children Act advisory committee that was established in 1991 to monitor the operation of the Act, and to comment on issues arising from its implementation. I advise the hon. Member for Ilford, South to look at the document—if he has not already done so—because it is invaluable.

Mr. Gapes *indicated assent.*

Mr. Burns: I see that he is nodding, which suggests that he has seen the document.

I assure the House and the hon. Member that the Government understand the fears and concerns of a parent who has obtained a contact order from the courts but who has been frustrated when the other parent has not complied with the order. We also understand the fear of a mother who is threatened with violence to her or her children. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this important—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order.

Mr. Michael Paynter

1 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the case of my constituent Michael Paynter and his experiences as a volunteer national service man at the former chemical defence establishment at Porton Down in the 1950s, which he believes, have resulted in permanent ill health. Having pursued the matter in some detail on his behalf for nearly two years, I am now convinced of the credibility of my constituent's claims, upon which I have drawn some serious conclusions that I wish to share with the House.

On 11 November 1994, Mr. Paynter came to see me at my surgery to seek advice on how he should pursue justice in response to the outcome of his experiences 40 years ago. In May 1954 and again in March 1955, Mr. Paynter—as a conscripted national service man in the RAF—volunteered to be the subject of research into the common cold at Porton Down. On both occasions, he stresses, that involved going into a gas chamber without any special protective clothing apart from a gas mask.

Mr. Paynter further stresses that, had he known that he was to be the subject of studies into anything else—and certainly studies into what I have been informed was the supposed real subject of the experiments—he would not have volunteered. Only research into the common cold was mentioned and, as a naive 18-year-old, he had no reason to question or disbelieve that. It was, after all, a welcome break during his two years as a conscripted national service man, and it also provided him and nine other volunteers with extra pocket money.

The fact is that Mr. Paynter has not enjoyed his previously robust good health ever since. Within six months of his second visit to Porton Down, he developed two skin infections that lasted for two and a half years. One was psoriasis that covered most of his body, while the other was running eczema. The latter infection hospitalised him for 10 weeks and did not clear up for 10 months. In 1956, he started to suffer severe migraines, for which he still receives medical care. He developed some small growths on his body that have never been diagnosed. In 1959, a twisted spinal column developed, causing permanent and severe restrictions on his neck movements, as well as other problems for which he has found no effective treatment.

In other words, since his experiences at Porton Down, Mr. Paynter's quality of life has been devastated—"Altogether, a life of hell," as he described it to me. All Mr. Paynter's claims are supported fully by his GP, Dr. Nandra. Indeed, it was his GP's unsuccessful attempt to obtain medical records of his time at Porton Down that caused Mr. Paynter to speculate that Porton Down could have been responsible for his bad health. The ITV "Network First" programme on 11 October 1994, which detailed similar cases to his, prompted him to seek my advice and help.

I referred my constituent's case to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind)—the then Secretary of State for Defence—and I received a reply from the then chief executive of the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down, Dr. Graham Pearson. That confirmed that Mr. Paynter attended the CBDE as a volunteer on two occasions—3 to 7 May 1954 and 28 March to 1 April 1955.

I was told that, on the first occasion, Mr. Paynter took part in treadmill testing to assess the physiological load induced by wearing individual protective equipment. On the second occasion, Mr. Paynter again took part in treadmill testing, and trials involving sensitivity to rubber mixes. On both occasions, I was told, there were no grounds for believing that those experiments would result in any harm or long-term health effects for Mr. Paynter.

All that was news to my constituent, who assures me that at no time did he undertake treadmill tests. He also points out that there was no follow-up whatever from Porton Down to discover whether there had been any effect on his health following his visit. In his letter to me, Dr. Pearson said rather pointedly that any volunteer who believes that his health has suffered as a result of participating in studies at Porton Down may apply for compensation or the award of a war pension.

That statement, in the light of what we know now, implies an acceptance of guilt on the part of the authorities at Porton Down. Moreover, Dr. Pearson pointed out that the medical records of such service volunteers are provided on request to their GPs, as is information from Porton Down on the studies in which they participated. That statement flies in the face of the experience of Mr. Paynter's GP, who has to this day been unable to obtain any record at all of any experiment carried out on Mr. Paynter at Porton Down.

I pursued those matters with Dr. Pearson and, in response, I received a reply from Mr. John Chisholm, the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, which now includes CBDE Porton Down as one of its divisions. In that letter, Mr. Chisholm re-emphasised that the past 40 years had shown no evidence of any harmful effect on the health of volunteers participating in studies at Porton Down. Moreover, the long-term purpose of those studies had been explained to the volunteers. Neither of those statements is true in Mr. Paynter's case.

Mr. Chisholm's letter confirmed that my constituent had taken part in a study to assess the effect on performance and personnel of wearing clothing designed to protect against chemical and biological agents, and to assess human sensitivity to rubber mixes used in making protective equipment. On neither occasion was Mr. Paynter exposed to biological or chemical warfare agents. Moreover, Mr. Chisholm pointed out that research into the common cold had never been undertaken at Porton Down.

Only when I pursued matters further with Mr. Chisholm did he reveal that my constituent had, in addition, participated in a study to investigate the effect of substances found in London smog. That involved exposure through a mask in a chamber for between 10 and 60 minutes, on one or two occasions, to an artificial fog containing sulphuric acid mist and various aldehydes produced by diesel engines. Those are the suspected toxic constituents of London smog—either alone or mixed with magnesium oxide or ammonia—and the experiment aimed to neutralise the irritant effects of the smog.

It is clear to me and to my constituent Mr. Paynter that that subsequent piece of information comes much closer to his recollection of his experience at Porton Down and the cause of his subsequent and permanent ill health. He recalls that the chamber remained completely clear throughout and that no visible smog appeared. As he rightly points out, if that was research into the effects of

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London smog, why was he required to wear a gas mask? Needless to say, Mr. Paynter was appalled to learn for the first time that he was apparently the victim of research into London smog, and had been "duped"—his term—into volunteering for tests involving potentially dangerous gases.

If the experiments to which my constituent was exposed were related to London smog and were not defence related, why were they being undertaken at the defence establishment? If they were not defence related and were otherwise more innocently in the public interest, why were the participants not informed that antidotes to smog were being researched? Why were the participants required to sign the Official Secrets Act 1911, binding them to confidentiality on every visit to Porton Down?

I sought answers from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to those questions together with related others in my letter of 31 July. I had originally sought to table the questions for written answer, but was told by the Table Office that that was prevented by the 30-year rule. I wanted my right hon. Friend's confirmation that research into London smog was undertaken at Porton Down, and on whether it involved volunteer national service men in the 1950s, if so, whether they were informed of that and whether such research was defence related. I wanted to know whether his Department had monitored the subsequent health of those national service men and how many applications for a war pension or compensation had been made by them. I wanted to know what legislation prevents them and their legal advisers from pursuing action and claims against his Department and why. And I wanted to learn more about the Nuremberg code and how it applied to the use of service men at Porton Down.

Unfortunately, the reply that I received from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told me that those matters are the responsibility of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and that its chief executive had been asked to reply to me directly. That reply from my right hon. Friend was dated 7 August, and until yesterday I had not received any such reply from the chief executive. Then, lo and behold, I received this reply from the Under-Secretary of State, Earl Howe. I must ask my hon. Friend the Minister of State why it has taken my successful application for this Adjournment debate to obtain a ministerial reply, which I was not originally going to receive.

I have not read my noble Friend's reply. Instead, I look forward to some clear answers to my questions from my hon. Friend the Minister of State today. In particular, I seek his response to my clear conclusion, in the light of my constituent's experiences at Porton Down, that national service men such as him were encouraged to be used as guinea pigs for research into the effects of certain gases, that, as my constituent adamantly maintains, they were told and accepted that it was research into the common cold, that that was never the case and that records were designed to show that it was research into the effects of London smog, but that the research in which they voluntarily and innocently participated was much more lethal and dangerous than that. It was indeed defence related, which necessitated and justified the application of the Official Secrets Act. In effect, it was exposure to G-agents—nerve gas known as sarin and mustard gas. As a consequence, those people's lives have been irrevocably impaired because their health defences have been damaged and destroyed. That is a grave national scandal.

All that duplicity is enough evidence to enable me to put it to my hon. Friend that it is incumbent on the Government to establish an independent inquiry into the use and clear abuse at Porton Down of young conscripts such as my constituent. Should such an inquiry support my conclusions, it must be right to come forward with compensation that fairly, justly and adequately reflects the abuse of volunteers who were unwittingly poisoned in the pursuit of studies related to chemical and biological warfare, which are vital to the defence of the realm. I understand that the American service men used in identical tests at Edgewood have been awarded such compensation.

If the Government do not establish such an investigation willingly, they will have to respond grudgingly to a judgment from the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, to which others are now appealing. That is not the right approach of a Conservative Government.

1.14 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) for this opportunity to discuss the important case of his constituent Mr. Michael Paynter, who attended as a volunteer at the chemical and biological defence research centre at Porton Down in the mid-1950s. I congratulate him on the robust presentation of his constituent's case.

Before I deal with the specific and detailed concerns that my hon. Friend raised—if there are any that I omit, we shall follow them up by letter immediately—I shall take a moment to explain the purpose of the Porton Down volunteer programme in which Mr. Paynter participated.

The role of the chemical and biological defence centre, which is now part of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, is to carry out research to provide the United Kingdom's armed forces with safe and effective protection against the real threat posed by chemical and biological weapons. My hon. Friend knows a great deal about that from his experience.

A vital part of that work involves the use of human volunteers to evaluate the military implications of the protective measures developed through the research. That has its roots in the work carried out during the first world war at the Porton site, in which soldiers acted as observers during trials to follow the release of clouds of poison gas such as chlorine. To date, around 20,000 service personnel have contributed—through their participation in the programme—to providing the UK armed forces with some of the most effective protection in the world.

Volunteers for those studies are drawn chiefly from the three armed services. It is they, of course, who will ultimately benefit from the products of the research carried out at Porton Down. Volunteers are recruited through notices posted widely in the armed forces and apply to attend through their local military chain of command. When volunteers arrive at Porton Down, they are medically examined to confirm their fitness. The exact nature of the studies in which they will take part is explained to them. Only after they have formally

consented to take part in a study by signing a consent form can the study begin. Once the studies are completed, a further medical examination is conducted prior to the volunteer's return to his unit.

I can assure the House that the use of human subjects at Porton Down is carefully controlled. All work requiring the involvement of volunteers is carried out according to a detailed written experimental protocol prepared by the scientists who wish to carry out the work in consultation with medical and military staff at Porton Down. The protocol is considered by an internal review committee to ensure that the use of human subjects is essential, that it is statistically sound and that it will provide valuable information that cannot be obtained by any other experimental methods. It also has to demonstrate that the proposed work complies with all the ethical guidelines for the conduct of work involving human subjects.

Once agreed, the protocol is referred to an independent ethics committee. That committee is made up of members of the medical and legal professions and lay members of the public and it includes experts in psychology and toxicology. Among other things, it considers whether the proposed work will present a hazard to the health of the volunteer and will not permit the work to commence if it does.

The members of that committee are not employees of the Ministry of Defence, although they provide reports on their deliberations to my Department's chief scientific adviser. In the past 80 years, the nature of the tests and the ways in which they are conducted have developed in response to changing principles and practices, as my hon. Friend will well understand. There has also been a considerable advance in the understanding of the hazards to health of many of the chemicals to which individuals are exposed.

It is, therefore, possible that some activities carried out in the past will raise concern when viewed through the eyes of scientists at the end of the 20th century. However, staff at Porton Down have always sought to follow the best practice existing in regard to human participation in trials and have endeavoured to promote a responsible approach to the involvement of volunteers in studies.

Having briefly outlined the procedures that currently govern the use of service personnel in studies at Porton Down, I come to the case of Mr. Michael Paynter, which was so well raised by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Paynter's case has been the subject of correspondence between my Department and my hon. Friend during the past two years. The facts of the case are that, in response to a request for volunteers that appeared in military station orders, Mr. Paynter attended the then chemical defence experimental establishment twice in the 1950s while completing his national service.

On the first occasion, in May 1954, Mr. Paynter took part in studies that required him to wear chemical protective clothing including a respirator while working on a treadmill under various different climatic conditions in a climatic chamber. That did not involve exposure to chemical warfare agents.

On his second visit, in March 1955, Mr. Paynter took part in similar physiological studies. In addition, he was involved in work to evaluate various rubber compounds proposed for use in respirator face pieces. Neither of those studies involved his exposure to any chemical warfare agents. His participation in those physiological studies and the evaluation of the rubber compounds was part of the on-going programme of research that has been conducted for the past 80 years to provide UK forces with clothing and respiratory protection to enable them to operate effectively in all military environments where the threat of attack from chemical and biological weapons exists.

During his second visit to Porton in March 1955, Mr. Paynter also participated in a study to evaluate the effects of some of the chemicals believed to be constituents of the London fogs. Those especially dense fogs, to which a large part of the population was exposed, had severely disrupted the life of the city at the time. My hon. Friend is too young to remember. The programme of work in which Mr. Paynter participated was part of the Government's research programme to investigate the causes and effects of the problem and possible solutions to it.

The research conducted at Porton Down contributed to the understanding of the hazards presented by the specific components of the fog and it would not have been unusual for research establishments across the Government to participate. That work, in conjunction with other related studies, eventually resulted in the clean air legislation of the 1960s, which considerably improved the atmosphere in our large cities and saw the disappearance of the London fogs of old.

My hon. Friend referred several times to Mr. Paynter's belief that he was participating in research into the common cold. I want to make it absolutely plain that at no time in its history has Porton Down ever conducted research into the common cold. All research relating to the common cold was conducted by the Medical Research Council on behalf of the Ministry of Health at the common cold unit based at Harnham down, Salisbury. That unit, which closed in 1989, had no connection with the Ministry of Defence.

My hon. Friend also asked about the Nuremberg code. The horrors exposed on the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps at the end of the second world war led to the development of the Nuremberg code of ethics in medical research. Since its inception, the principles laid out in the code have governed all the work relating to human subjects at Porton Down. The code emphasises the essential voluntary nature of the consent to participate and states that volunteers must be made aware of the nature of the study, its duration, its purpose, the method and means by which it is to be carried out, all inconvenience and hazards that can be reasonably expected and any likely effects on their health that are known to those proposing the study.

All the work in which Mr. Paynter participated would have required him to have that information provided to him so that he could make an informed decision to consent to participate in the studies. No work would have commenced involving Mr. Paynter unless he had given his informed consent freely and without duress. It is also made very clear to volunteers throughout their attendance at Porton Down that they are free to withdraw from studies at any time without prejudice or having to provide any reasons for their wish to do so.

My hon. Friend also asked about the legislation that prevents service personnel from pursuing claims and action against the Ministry of Defence. In 1987, the House passed the Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Act,

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which gave current and former service personnel the right to seek compensation for personal injury or loss arising from the negligence of the Ministry of Defence as their employer.

The 1987 Act repealed the Crown Proceedings Act 1947, section 10 of which had prevented service personnel from taking action against their employer for negligence. In passing the 1987 Act, the House thought very carefully about whether the legislation should be retrospective, but concluded that it should not, so incidents and injury sustained before 1987 are not covered.

As I made clear, all work at Porton Down complies with the principles stated in the Nuremberg code, and with revisions to ethical guidelines produced in the intervening 50 years. Nevertheless, we must consider the remote possibility of a volunteer claiming that his health has suffered as a result of the activities that he undertook at Porton Down. In such a case, the individual can apply to the Department of Social Security for the award of a war pension. That is subject to an assessment of each individual's claimed disability and a consideration of the impact of the activities in which he participated. In dealing with such claims, staff at the War Pensions Agency are provided with all the information that remains in the experimental records at Porton Down.

To date, Porton Down has supplied the War Pensions Agency with details of the attendance of approximately 40 former volunteers. Staff at Porton Down also provide such information to the volunteers or to their medical representatives when they write to request those details. So far, fewer than 100 of approximately 20,000 volunteers have requested such details.

I and the Ministry of Defence owe my hon. Friend and his constituent an apology for the wholly unacceptable delay in replying to his last letter on this case. I am very sorry—and know that my noble Friend Lord Howe is, too—that it took so long for a reply to reach him. I have today instigated inquiries as to why that should have happened. However, I think that he goes a little far in implying that we may have been less than open in respect of the amount of information that has been made available to Mr. Paynter.

Mr. David Atkinson: Given the wide discrepancy between my constituent's recollection of his experience at Porton Down and what my hon. Friend has told the House about his experience as recorded there, is there not a case for further investigation?

Mr. Soames: I shall come to that point later because I have a helpful suggestion for my hon. Friend.

The nature of the information recorded with regard to the volunteer programme has also developed over the years. Details held on those who participate in studies at present are kept in paper folders that include the volunteer's entry and exit medical reports, a copy of their consent to participate and many other detailed records. That level of information is felt to be comprehensive by modern standards. Sadly, such information is not available for many of our former volunteers, and many of the remaining records are incomplete. Unfortunately, in some cases it is impossible to provide any further elucidation beyond confirming the dates of attendance and the general type of activity.

In Mr. Paynter's case, we have now found a fair amount of information, although as we have admitted to my hon. Friend, we had some difficulties in identifying that Mr. Paynter participated in the London smog trials, principally because of the nature of the records now held. We have made all the relevant facts available and provided my hon. Friend and Mr. Paynter with considerable detail.

I understand that in addition to details of the studies in which he participated, staff at Porton Down have provided Mr. Paynter with copies of technical papers believed to relate to the studies in which he took part. They have also offered to meet him to talk through the results discussed in the papers. Such a meeting, which he has yet to arrange, would be very helpful in addressing any other major concerns regarding his experience and would be a fruitful route to pursue in respect of the further inquiries to which my hon. Friend referred. I shall be happy to follow up the result of that meeting.

I wish to close by thanking my hon. Friend for bringing Mr. Paynter's case to the attention of the House. My Department is grateful to Mr. Paynter and all the others for their participation in the work of Porton Down. Without the involvement of human subjects, it would be impossible to evaluate the effects of wearing the equipment developed at Porton Down on the ability of the armed forces to carry out normal military tasks in hazardous environments. That was well demonstrated by the equipment and kit used by British armed forces in the Gulf, where there was a real threat of the use of chemical or biological weapons. The Ministry of Defence is very grateful to all those who through their participation in studies at Porton Down have contributed to providing the UK with safe and effective protection.

I profoundly sympathise with Mr. Paynter's concerns about his ill health, and we have tried to deal with his questions openly and honestly and to the full extent of the information that is now available. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept my reassurance and further urge his constituent to meet officials at Porton Down, if necessary with my hon. Friend's attendance, to discuss any further ideas that Mr. Paynter may have about how we can help him.

A5 Improvements (Ynys Môn)

1.29 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I begin by telling the House of the deep sense of anger and betrayal felt by my constituents at the Welsh Office's announcement on 10 July 1996 about the A5-A55 improvements in Anglesey that private funding was being sought for the project and that the starting date was to be put back 18 months at least.

We are angry that the announcement was made in a reply to a parliamentary question from the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney). This is the first time that any announcement on the A5 has been made in that way without consultation or prior notice. We feel betrayed by the content of the statement. Three "Roads in Wales" publications, a departmental report, a reply to a Select Committee report, a budget statement, ministerial statements and countless letters, up to 24 May this year, had made it clear that the Welsh Office regarded the improvements as a high priority to be paid for from public funds.

Those feelings are shared across the island of Anglesey—by the local authority, community councils, businesses and all who believe that the road improvements are crucial for the economic future of our communities. The anger and betrayal are felt most deeply by those who live on the route of the current A5. The residents of Caerwen, Gwalchmai, Bryngwran, Caergeiliog, Valley and Holyhead have to put up day after day and night after night with movements of traffic such a scale that their lives are becoming intolerable. According to a local authority report,

"the nuisance they suffer relates to noise, vibration, poor air quality, severance by traffic, road safety problems and visual intrusion."

In many cases, they also suffer from structural damage to their properties.

The road safety aspect is significant. In 1988, Gwynedd county council—the then highway authority—published an analysis of accidents on the A5. It found a concentration of accidents in the five villages on the route, and particularly along London road in Holyhead. Indeed, the A5 through Holyhead—one and a quarter miles of the 18-mile section in Anglesey—accounted for one fifth of all injury accidents. It is estimated that completing the road would reduce accidents by 70 per cent.

Then there are the economic arguments. The current situation, with long tailbacks at peak periods and heavy traffic during most of the day, is causing havoc for businesses that rely on good transport facilities. Successful businesses cannot tolerate such long delays on the major road artery serving the island. They all speak of the need to start the road programme as quickly as possible. I shall quote later in my speech from some of the letters that I have received. I have already received letters from more than half the community councils on the island, as well as more than 50 letters from businesses and organisations. I know that there are more to come.

Let me try to put the scale of the traffic into perspective. The second road crossing on to the island and the dual carriageway bypassing Llanfairpwll were completed in the early 1980s. In 1981, 22,465 freight units were going by road to Holyhead and a total of 123,764 cars and coaches. In 1995, the totals were 69,697 freight units and 408,474 cars and coaches—increases of 210 per cent. and 230 per cent. respectively. Those staggering figures do not take into account the increase in local traffic, the impact of the HSS vessel introduced by Stena this year or the new Irish Ferries super-ferry, said to be the largest in north-west Europe, which is due to come into service in Holyhead in 1997.

Let me recap on the story to date. The first significant development occurred on 13 April 1988, when I led a local authority delegation to the Welsh Office and met the then Minister, the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts). After we had pressed our case, he declared that the Welsh Office had decided to dual the section from Llanfairpwll to Turnpike Nant.

Naturally, the delegation was pleased with the announcement as far as it went. I pressed the Minister not to close his mind to completing the dualling of the road all the way to Holyhead. I asked him to receive further evidence, and he readily agreed. Shortly afterwards, I supplied him with a memorandum setting out the case to deal with the whole section. I have re-read that memorandum in preparation for today's debate. The figures that I quoted on the increase in traffic to Holyhead proved remarkably accurate.

The Minister's announcement about dualling part of the section was confirmed in "Roads in Wales, Progress and Plans for the 1990s", published in 1989, which stated that the section to Turnpike Nant was included in the road building programme. It also said:

"The case for upgrading the remainder of the road across Anglesey is being considered".

The work was scheduled to commence not before 1994-95 and we were told informally that it could well start during that financial year.

We knew that our campaign to dual the whole road to Holyhead had been successful when the document entitled "The A55: The Road of Opportunity" was published late in 1989. There was a palpable sense of relief on the island that the case for the completion of the whole road to Holyhead had been won.

Our efforts were then directed to securing a timetable for the work. No indication came until the publication of the "Roads in Wales" 1992 supplement. It specified that stage 1, from Llanfairpwll to Turnpike Nant, was expected to start between April 1995 and March 1988. Stage 2, from Turnpike Nant to west of Bryngwran, was expected to start within the same period. Stage 3, from west of Bryngwran to Ty Mawr Holyhead, was expected to start after March 1998. The Holyhead relief road was expected to start before April 1995. None of those works has yet been started.

In its response to the report of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs in March 1992, the Welsh Office said:

"The specific objectives of completing the M4 and dualling the A55 will be completed by the mid 1990s".

We are now coming towards the end of the 1990s.

The next step was the publication of "Roads in Wales: 1994 Review", published in July of that year. The document contained no firm timetable, but it made several

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key statements on Government policy. A number of road schemes were deferred or taken out of the programme, while others were given priority status. The document said:

"High priority is attached to extending the A55 across Anglesey to Holyhead. This road will be designated the A55. It is planned to publish draft orders for the Holyhead relief road"—

which was by then late—

"and the stage from Llanfairpwllgwyngyll to Nant Turnpike during 1994".

The report confirmed that the road was to be built in four sections, as outlined in 1992. However, that was to change. The scheme was later reduced from four sections to two.

The people of Anglesey were still concerned by the lack of a firm timetable for the building of the road. We had seen the dates slip, with promises of starts in 1994-95 and in 1996 failing to materialise. The first sign of a proper programme came in a letter sent by the then Secretary of State dated 15 May 1995. In view of its importance to the debate, I want to quote the relevant paragraph in full. He said:

"I can assure you that I attach high priority to extending the A55 dual carriageway across Anglesey. This is reflected in the plans I announced on 9 March in the 'Departmental Report 1995—The Government's Expenditure Plans 1995-96 to 1997-98' (Cm 2815). A copy of the Major Scheme Forward Trunk Road Programme is enclosed for your information. You will see from this that two schemes—A55 Llanfair PG-west of Bryngwran and A55 west of Bryngwran-Holyhead—costing over £120 million are included in the highest programmed category, i.e. planned to start before April 1998. I am afraid that it is not possible to give a more precise start of work date at this stage."

The letter also confirmed the road's strategic importance in European terms.

Given those assurances, the people of Anglesey felt that further pressure should be applied to bring the starting date forward. At least we knew that the Treasury had earmarked funds for the project, which was clearly shown as part of the Government's expenditure plans.

A meeting was held on 31 October 1995 with the current Minister with responsibility for transport in Wales, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), at which he received a deputation, which I again led. We pressed him hard on the dates and we came away with the view that the first section could be started in the financial year 1996-97, and the second section would follow 12 months later. The 1995 public expenditure statement confirmed our view. On 13 December 1995, the Secretary of State said:

"the A55 improvements across Anglesey are important, and I plan to start the first stage of those improvements next year."—[*Official Report*, 13 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 1004.]

Subsequently, he explained that next year meant the next financial year, ending 31 March 1997. I know that the Welsh Office has said to the local authority that there is reference in the statement to the use of private finance. Let me make it perfectly clear that that is a misleading statement, because that refers to other projects and not to the A55. The reference to the A55 in that document cites that public funds would be used.

The Under-Secretary wrote to a number of people to confirm the timetable. He wrote to Ynys Môn county council on 24 May and said:

"work on the new road is scheduled to begin in the spring of 1997, demonstrating the commitment to the extension of the A55 across Anglesey."

The local community had worked hard to secure those commitments. We were now being assured by the Welsh Office that the building of the road was a priority; that work on the first section would start in spring 1997; that work on the second section would start in the following year; and that public funds would be used. Little wonder then that the announcement made on 10 July caused such anger and outrage. It came only eight weeks after the Minister's final letter confirming the previous plans. It was made near the end of the summer session. It was made without consultation with the highway authority and on the day when the LG announcement was made. The Government were no doubt hoping to bury the bad news with the good—perhaps the link between the two is closer than we might imagine.

That announcement marked the first time that I was not given any warning about an announcement concerning the A5 in Anglesey. On previous occasions, I was always given at least a couple of days' prior warning, and rightly so, because it is a major issue in my constituency. Why choose to make the announcement in an answer to a question from the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan? What possible interest could he have in the A5 in Anglesey?

The sense of anger and betrayal to which I referred now has to be channelled into a campaign to demand that the Welsh Office keeps its promise to the people of Anglesey. I have received an overwhelming response to my request for support, and I should like to quote from some of the letters I have received. Beaumaris town council's letter is typical of many. It states:

"Dear Mr. Jones

A5-A55 improvement

Thank you for your letter of the 13 September which I have read to my council. As a consequence I am asked to reply, and say my council is 100 per cent. behind your cause and wishes you well in your efforts to improve the situation on Anglesey."

A representative of Tref Alaw community council wrote:

"The new road is already years behind schedule, without mentioning the further delay."

Businesses have been equally forthright. A representative of Anglesey Aluminium has written:

"The poor capacity of the existing A5 has been a deterrent to several aluminium use intensive businesses from locating near the smelter."

Many businesses have written to say that the condition of the A5 is a disincentive to inward investors, and some report that it is difficult to find suppliers who will deliver to the island. Even more alarming is the news that some might relocate unless the road programme moves ahead quickly. One business man wrote

"To bring the road to our doorstep then stop is an insult."

The two companies that operate ferry services from Holyhead have been strong in their condemnation of the Welsh Office decision. Stena's ship and port manager said:

"Stena Line has invested £46 million in redeveloping the Port of Holyhead . . . Both companies have committed large new ferries . . . There is no doubt that we are fast approaching the stage where the growth in business needed to justify the massive investments by the ferry companies and port authority is being stifled by the inadequate access routes."

The managing director of Irish Ferries, Gerry Hickey, wrote:

"The arrival of the new superferry in May 1995 has dramatically increased the traffic through the port, and this has been summarised on the accompanying table, with projections for 1997.

Since announcing plans regarding investment in this route in 1993, Irish Ferries has kept all its promises, and to date we have had little support from the Welsh Office".

He also sounds a warning that unless we get our act together, the port of Liverpool with its excellent motorway connections threatens to take business away from Holyhead.

The Under-Secretary has had a flavour of the anger, betrayal and outrage felt by the people of Anglesey as a result of the Welsh Office announcement. He is aware that the current campaign is designed to secure a change of mind. The least I expect from him today is to tell me that the Welsh Office will review its decision and will meet a delegation consisting of the people of Anglesey to present our case; otherwise its decision is just another one of those broken promises that have littered the Government's path since 1992.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Jonathan Evans): As the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) has pointed out, the Government announced their commitment to dual the A5 trunk road across Anglesey in the document published in December 1989, "The A55: The Road of Opportunity". The importance that the Government place on improving the route across the island has been reiterated on many occasions since then, as the hon. Gentleman has pointed out. We announced our intention to redesignate the proposed road as the A55 in "Roads in Wales: 1994 Review" to give continuity with the A55 dual carriageway on the mainland. Since then, as we have heard, work has progressed on the design and the statutory procedures, not all of which have yet been concluded, which are necessary to bring a scheme to the point where tenders for main works contracts can be invited. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there are statutory inquiry proceedings still outstanding in relation to part of the scheme.

On 13 December 1995, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave details to the House of the Department's spending plans for Wales for 1996-97. He reiterated the importance of the A55 improvements across Anglesey, on which preparation work was continuing, and, as we have heard, continues, and referred to his wish to develop a number of major road schemes in partnership with the private sector.

On 10 July, the Under-Secretary with responsibility for roads in Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), confirmed that funding was to be sought for three major road schemes in Wales: the M4 relief road south of Newport, the A465 improvement between Abergavenny and Hirwaun and the A55 dual carriageway across Anglesey between Llanfairpwllgwyngyll and Holyhead. My hon. Friend is unable to respond to the hon. Gentleman today because he is on a trade mission to south-east Asia. On 10 July, he also announced the intention to take each of those projects forward under the private finance initiative as design, build, finance and operate—DBFO—schemes.

My hon. Friend again emphasised the importance of the planned A55 dual carriageway proposals, and I want to reiterate his comments. I accept many of the points that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn has made about the importance of the work. My hon. Friend said that, subject to satisfactory completion of legal procedures, work on the scheme was expected to begin in autumn 1998, with the road being completed some three years later. It deserves to be emphasised that that is about the same time span as would have been involved if construction were undertaken by conventional means.

The Government place great importance on design, build, finance and operate contracts for major trunk road improvements, which form a significant part of our PFI. Just a few days ago, colleagues in England were able to announce plans for major improvements to the M40 between London and Oxford. I am pleased to note that a Welsh company, Hyder, was part of the successful consortium that was awarded that contract. I know of the widespread interest in those projects.

There are a number of misconceptions about the contracts. Let me make it clear at the outset that there is no question of tolling booths being placed at strategic intervals across Anglesey, as has been claimed. I accept that the hon. Gentleman has never claimed that, but it has been claimed in some quarters. The system is that the contractor designs the new road, funds its construction, and manages and maintains the road—together with any existing roads that form part of the contract—for a certain period, usually 30 years. In return, the Government pay shadow tolls using a formula based on the number of vehicles using the road and on lane availability. The DBFO contractor, by the nature of the contract, has a long-term interest in the road, which gives a greater guarantee that the initial construction standard will be maintained.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the misunderstandings that have given a number of community councils on Anglesey, and Anglesey county council, cause for concern. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary have received a number of requests for meetings to discuss the July announcement on funding the scheme and to express concern about the Department's alleged lack of commitment to the scheme proceeding within the announced time scale.

The July announcement was apparently received with some surprise locally. The hon. Gentleman said that there was a mood of anger and betrayal. Why that should be so is not clear. Since my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's statement to the House last December, all public statements have reiterated the point that the Secretary of State is considering delivering a number of major road programmes in Wales through the private finance initiative.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Does the Minister accept that the original plan was to build a road using the public

[Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones]

finance that had been allocated? Does he also accept that on previous occasions I was given advance warning of each step?

Mr. Evans: I am unable to comment on the hon. Gentleman's last point: I am sure that he will accept that. In the interests of road building and capital projects in Wales, we must surely explore the opportunities for involving the private finance initiative. If major capital works can be progressed on that basis, we are likely to have greater capital expenditure across the Principality than would otherwise be the case. The core of the hon. Gentleman's observations today was that the delivery of the scheme would be delayed. The time scale referred to would allow the scheme to be delivered within the initial time scale proposed. I accept his point that the preliminary start date will not be the same, but the point of delivery will be. It is the core date that is important.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met members of the North Wales Economic Forum on 4 September at Wrexham. It was stressed at that meeting that members of the forum placed great emphasis on the Welsh Office adhering to the timetable for extending the A55 across Anglesey, as the overriding need was to ensure that north Wales had a robust transport infrastructure, with adequate links to the country's motorway network. My right hon. Friend recognised the importance of the A55 route to north Wales, and the need to ensure that the scheme was not delayed. He acknowledged that there might be some initial delay in the start of construction, especially while the Bryngwran-Holyhead section was subject to statutory procedures. The completion of the whole length of the dual carriageway was expected to be within the planned timetable, as I outlined.

I also emphasise that there will be no short cuts, literal or metaphorical, as a result of taking this scheme forward under PFI. All the necessary statutory procedures have to be undertaken, and orders made. Any commitments given in correspondence and at the public local inquiry will be included as part of the PFI contract. The adoption of the PFI approach involves the form and method of procurement, rather than the date when the scheme is likely to be delivered. The statutory procedures are not affected. The highways orders for the section between Llanfairpwllgwyngyll and Bryngwran were made earlier this year following a public inquiry into the proposals—the second public inquiry for the Bryngwran to Holyhead section is expected to be held in early 1997—and every opportunity will be given, in the normal way, for authorities or individuals to register their support for the scheme, or objections to any aspect of it.

The hon. Gentleman referred in great detail to the increase in traffic growth on the island. That increase, together with the pressures that it brings, is one of the main reasons why the Government have attached high priority to extending the dualling of the A55 across Anglesey. The traffic need for the new improvement is well documented in the Welsh Office's evidence to the public inquiry into the section between Llanfairpwllgwyngyll and Bryngwran, and recorded by the inspector in his report. A similar case will be put to the public inquiry, to be held early in the new year, into the remaining section between Bryngwran and Holyhead, at which the hon. Gentleman, the Ynys Môn county council and any other interested parties will have the opportunity of expressing their strong support for the scheme, as the hon. Gentleman has consistently done—support that he has outlined to the House again today.

The proposed dual carriageway, when it is built, will have adequate capacity to cater for the projected traffic growth on the island, including any that may result from increases in ferry capacity. The programme of the scheme is aimed at completing the whole length of the improvement across the island in the shortest possible time. The projection that has been made of the time from the start of the scheme to the date on which it is expected to be delivered will be shown to be correct.

On matters of detail concerning the construction of the project, I confirm that it is intended that the road will be built and will be completed as one length between Llanfairpwllgwyngyll and Holyhead. The Department is willing, in principle, to include an additional interchange—which was requested by the Anglesey county council—within the DBFO contract, subject to certain conditions of which the county council was previously advised. Having studied the correspondence, I know that the hon. Gentleman is aware of the county council's concern in that regard and of the conditions that were previously outlined by the Welsh Office.

The Welsh Office also pointed out to the county council that it is prepared to adopt the same approach in respect of possible road links at the Caerwen and Ty Mawr junctions, and that those and other issues would have to be further discussed with officials of the Department's highways directorate. Highways directorate officials in the Welsh Office will continue to liaise with local authority officials to keep them abreast of developments in the scheme.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the request for a meeting with a delegation. I must make it clear to him that the Welsh Office is of the view that the scheme has been properly introduced under the PFI. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State hosted a reception for a number of contractors and others who may be involved in bidding for PFI schemes in Wales and elsewhere in the United Kingdom. I am aware of the substantial interest, especially in relation to major road schemes of this sort. If, therefore, the hon. Gentleman's request is based on the premise that the Secretary of State will be deflected from proceeding with the matter under a PFI scheme, no useful purpose will be served by such a meeting.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will gather from my observations that the highways directorate staff, and even Ministers, are willing to engage in a dialogue about how the scheme should be taken forward. That is the dialogue that we seek, and there would be no point in leaving this debate in the belief that there is anything to be gained by returning to a conventional publicly funded route and not proceeding on the basis of the announcement made in July.

Mr. Jones: It is important for the Minister to understand the context of the request for a meeting. I understand his point, but it is important for the Welsh Office to meet a delegation to discuss the matters that he has said are vital. We need to know what will happen.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman and I have known each other long enough for him to know that I am never reluctant to meet hon. Members or to receive delegations. However, there is no purpose in holding such a meeting on the premise that the Government will be deflected from their intentions, given in the announcement, about how the scheme should be taken forward. That announcement was made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is now taking the matter forward with the Welsh Office. If the meeting is to be held within that context, it is that and not a lack of courtesy on the part of the Welsh Office that leads my right hon. and hon. Friends to say that no purpose would be served by it at this point. If there are other matters that the hon. Gentleman wants to pursue—

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Cumbernauld Development Corporation

1. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a progress report on the wind–up of Cumbernauld development corporation. [38704]

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): Cumbernauld development corporation is on course for complete wind-up by 31 December 1996.

Mr. Hogg: I thank the Minister for that reply. Will he join me in thanking Cumbernauld development corporation, its officers and members of the board, past and present, for the considerable achievements in developing the new town, not least in inward investment? Will he consider the issue of inward investment into retail trading as shopping in Cumbernauld is not nearly as good as it should be for a town of its size? Would the Minister be kind enough to meet me to discuss that matter of importance to local people?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman is a firm advocate for his constituents. Whenever he has asked for a meeting with me I have been only too pleased to give it, and I am more than willing to meet him to discuss the issue that he has raised today. I am happy to praise David Mitchell, his board and all the staff of the development corporation for the significant work that they have done for Cumbernauld. When I was last there, they showed me the retail development work that they had done. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, they are now at about phase 5 of the retail development, which is being carried out by the new local authority in conjunction with the private sector. I hope that it will develop smoothly and successfully for the people of Cumbernauld.

Inward Investment

2. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the latest figures for inward investment into Scotland. [38705]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): Inward investment in Scotland continues to perform at record levels, the latest good news story being the decision by Hyundai to invest in Dunfermline, creating 4,000 jobs in the long term and providing more than £2 billion of inward investment.

Mr. Coombs: First, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his birthday and wish him a happy day as well as a busy one. Does he agree that the Hyundai investment project would have been impossible if Scotland and the rest of the kingdom had been burdened with the social chapter and the national minimum wage, let alone the tartan tax north of the border? Is it not much more likely that the success of the Scottish Office in attracting that investment has been brought about by the successful economic, education and training policies carried out in Scotland in the past 17 years?

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his birthday wishes. On my birthday last year, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State arranged for me to open the Skye bridge, and it is a delight to be at Scottish Question Time today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) points to an important factor in inward investment. Such companies are coming to Scotland not for the climate but because we offer a quality work force and a competitive environment. That means low taxes and low inflation. Undoubtedly, if we had the social chapter, the minimum wage and the tartan tax we would be disadvantaged in that international competition, and jobs and investment would be put at risk.

Mr. David Marshall: How many, if any, foreign companies have recently located in the city of Glasgow? What is the right hon. Gentleman doing to help Glasgow's efforts to attract inward investment to the city?

Mr. Forsyth: I am happy to do all that I can to attract investment to Glasgow. One of the first things that we need to do is to get rid of the high-spending Labour council that has made Glasgow uncompetitive.

Sir Hector Monro: In view of today's excellent news of a drop in the unemployment figures for Scotland, will my right hon. Friend give an approximate estimate of the number of new jobs in the pipeline for Fife brought by Locate in Scotland and, no doubt, by local enterprise and the local council? Has he ever heard a word of commendation and thanks from the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen for the tremendous achievement in Fife, bearing in mind the doom and gloom they put out when times were difficult?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), the industry Minister, tells me that the total is 9,000 jobs. That is a significant achievement for Scotland. The Government have played their part, but it would be wrong not to draw attention to the part played by Fife council and the local enterprise companies in achieving that success. It means that we have delivered what we promised. Following the closure of both Rosyth and Ravenscraig, we promised that we would bring new jobs and new opportunities to those areas. That has happened because we have embraced the enterprise culture and been prepared to go out and win business for Scotland. The people of Scotland have reciprocated and I believe that as we approach the millennium we shall see more and more examples of people locating in Scotland because of the environment that we offer and will continue to offer under a Conservative Government.

Mr. Galloway: Is it not likely that the owners of Hyundai, although South Korean, can read English and that they know from opinion polls and from the opinions of every serious commentator that there will be a Labour Government before Hyundai lays a brick or makes a single thing in its new plant in Dunfermline—a Government who will have signed up to the social chapter

and introduced a national minimum wage? Does that not give the lie to the smear that our policies are somehow a disincentive to inward investors? Can the Secretary of State say, with his hand on his heart, that the Hyundai spokesmen ever raised with him any concern about an incoming Labour Government's commitment on the social chapter and a minimum wage?

Mr. Forsyth: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the size of his cigar—I do not know whether it is a birthday present for me or a sign of new Labour. The answer to his question is that I visited Korea earlier this year and the social chapter was one of the issues that were regularly raised with me by companies such as Hyundai in relation to their concern about costs. Indeed, I have unashamedly sold Scotland on the basis that we do not have the burdens carried by other European countries being considered as a location.

As for the hon. Gentleman's point about opinion polls and press reports, the people with whom we deal in inward investment are very sophisticated, very intelligent and very clever and they will no doubt take account of the fact that the opinion polls before the last election predicted the result that the hon. Gentleman would have wanted. He will find himself disappointed once again.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is essential not only for inward investment but for indigenous companies to have a competitive economic environment in which they can continue to succeed? Has he, like me, been approached by a number of individuals in senior appointments in Scottish companies who are deeply concerned about the impact of a possible tartan tax and other policies which might erode that competitive environment? They have told me clearly that they will move.

Mr. Forsyth: I agree that the tartan tax would be a disaster for Scotland and it would certainly put us at a disadvantage compared with the rest of the United Kingdom in attracting inward investment. My hon. Friend is right to point out the importance of costs. For example, in my discussions with Hyundai, one of the issues on which we focused was the cost of electricity in Scotland which, thanks to our privatisation programme, has been falling and has therefore made us more competitive. We had a long discussion about the relative cost of electricity in Scotland versus the cost in the United States. It is extremely naive to assume that those companies will not examine employment costs. The point about the social chapter and the tartan tax is that they add to those costs in an industry in which labour costs are very important.

Mr. Gallie: I welcome the announcements made during the recess of 200 jobs for Rhor and a further 100 jobs for Western Welsh in my constituency. I also welcome the intended £250 million private finance initiative investment for the new air traffic control centre in Prestwick. May I ask my right hon. Friend to press that issue hard with the Treasury and with the Department of Transport?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend seems to fill every post with letters to me on that issue, and I know of his enthusiasm to ensure that Ayr benefits from that private finance initiative. I also very much welcome the support that he has had from Opposition Members for it. My hon. Friend's arguments will of course be made robustly. As he knows, this is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, with whom I have had occasion to discuss the matter following my hon. Friend's representations, and he has assured me that he has been inundated with information on this matter from my hon. Friend. I know that my right hon. Friend will carefully consider all the arguments so robustly made by my hon. Friend on behalf of his constituents.

I am grateful for my hon. Friend's welcome for the good news in Ayr. There are more jobs in Ayr, and the prospects for employment for people in Ayr are very strong. I know that my hon. Friend will continue to represent the people of Ayr for many years to come.

Mr. Donohoe: The Secretary of State will be aware of the recent announcement of the closure of Robert Wilson and Sons—established in 1849 in my constituency—with the loss of 280 jobs. In those circumstances, does the Secretary of State agree that it is surely wrong to take a decision, which he has already taken, for the early wind-up of the development corporation in Irvine? The redundancies at Robert Wilson and Sons are only the latest of many redundancies in my constituency, and they clearly demonstrate the folly of the early wind-up of the development corporation in Irvine.

Mr. Forsyth: I share the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for ensuring that we minimise job losses in his constituency and maximise new opportunities. If he has specific proposals that he would like to discuss, having written to me on the subject, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland with responsibility for industry and local government would be delighted to see him.

Mr. George Robertson: I warmly welcome the announcements of inward investment coming to Scotland, especially the Hyundai investment in Dunfermline and the Chunghwa and Lite-on decisions in Lanarkshire. I congratulate all who were involved in local and national Government on bringing those valuable jobs to Scotland. I should, however, remind the Secretary of State of the reality that must have faced those intelligent and highly astute inward investors. They were faced with a situation in which we are six months away from a general election and in which the governing party in Scotland has a miserable 13 per cent. approval in public opinion—just 1 per cent. higher than when the Secretary of State took office a year ago. They could have come to only one serious conclusion—that there will be a Labour Government and that that Government will achieve constitutional reform and a Scottish Parliament for Scotland based, through a referendum, on the specific consent of the Scottish people. Those investors, like the majority of the Scottish people, concluded that a Labour Government will be good for Scotland and good for their industrial future.

Mr. Forsyth: Oddly enough, I did not feel that it was part of our marketing of Scotland to draw attention to the possibility suggested by the hon. Gentleman. Telling inward investors that there was a prospect of a Labour Government, who would impose a specific higher income tax rate in Scotland, does not seem to me to be a very

attractive prospect to outline when one is competing not only in terms of the United Kingdom versus Belgium or Ireland, but in terms of Scotland as the preferred location in the United Kingdom. I did not feel that it was incumbent upon me to draw attention to the hon. Gentleman's aspirations.

On inward investment, it is striking that those companies plan on a long-term basis and try to minimise uncertainty. If they have observed the antics of the Labour party in Scotland, they will have seen four changes of policy on devolution and the tartan tax. They may believe that reality will break in and the Labour party will have to abandon its plans for a tartan tax and a tax-raising Parliament if it eventually decides to put the interests of country before those of party.

Local Government Finance (Clackmannanshire)

4. **Mr. O'Neill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to meet Clackmannanshire council to discuss local government finance. [38707]

Mr. Kynoch: Neither the hon. Gentleman nor Clackmannanshire council has requested such a meeting.

Mr. O'Neill: Since the question was tabled, there has been some movement by the Government, which the local authority welcomes, in respect of the funding of the A907 improvements. However, two other aspects of local government financial problems require attention. One is the partnership priority area bid and the competition for additional funds, for which Clackmannan is in contention. Will the Minister tell us when the bidding process will be completed and when an announcement is likely to be made?

The second aspect relating to the road system in Clackmannanshire is the likely construction of a westward element to the Kincardine bridge. When will an announcement be made about that? It is important for the industrial development of an area in which, even allowing for the slight improvement in unemployment figures today, 18 per cent. of males capable of working and ready to work cannot get jobs. Will the Minister act as a matter of urgency to resolve these matters so that the anxieties of people in Clackmannanshire can be allayed?

Mr. Kynoch: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman recognises that the Government have moved to help Clackmannanshire council. I thought that he might ask for a meeting with me, in which case I would have suggested that he bring the newly elected Conservative councillor, Alastair Campbell, who on 10 October increased the Conservative majority in a by-election in Clackmannan. I congratulate Mr. Campbell and wish him well in bringing common sense to Clackmannan council.

With regard to the specific issues that the hon. Gentleman raised, I am assured by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, who is responsible for transport matters in Scotland, that announcements will be made shortly.

Dr. Spink: Can my hon. Friend confirm that grant support in Scotland is 44 per cent. higher than in England, and how can I justify that to my constituents?

Madam Speaker: Order. We are dealing with a particular council. The hon. Gentleman is aware—*[Interruption.]* Order. I will deal with this. The hon. Gentleman will relate his question to Clackmannanshire, or he will not be called. Which is it to be?

Dr. Spink: I have visited Clackmannanshire four times in the past two years, but I doubt whether the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) has ever visited my constituency.

Will my hon. Friend the Minister comment on the profligacy of Liberal and Labour-controlled councils such as that of Clackmannanshire?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend is right that Labour-controlled local authorities and some Liberal Democrat and Scottish National party local authorities have complained that they must make cuts in expenditure this year—at a time when, as my hon. Friend rightly stated, they are being funded by central Government with taxpayers' money at 44 per cent. more per head than those south of the border. Clackmannanshire has a budget this year which enables it to increase last year's budget by almost 6 per cent.; yet like many other Labour councils, it is talking of cuts. That is because of their inheritance from outgoing councils which did not adhere to budgets. That is typical of the financial management of the Opposition parties. We believe in setting budgets and keeping to them.

Mr. Chisholm: When will the Minister face up to the crisis in local government finance in Clackmannanshire and elsewhere, which arises from the Government's squeeze on spending and from their serious underestimate of the costs of local government reorganisation? Why is his response a planned 1.4 per cent. cut in grant levels for next year, which would mean massive council tax increases in Clackmannanshire and elsewhere simply to keep cash budgets at their present unsatisfactory level? If tomorrow's joint report by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the costs of local government reorganisation confirms what Labour has been saying, will the Minister undertake to increase grant levels so that local council tax payers do not have to pay the price for this Government's miscalculations and incompetence?

Mr. Kynoch: If the hon. Gentleman knew how government worked, he would know that it is far too early to talk of next year's settlement. Equally, I suspect that it is too early realistically to look at the cost of reorganisation to local authorities. Indeed, as I travelled around the country during the summer and visited many local authorities, I was appalled to find that most of them were unable even at that stage of the year to present management accounts to enable councillors to determine how they were performing against budget. That indicates to me that it is difficult for councils to make the sort of statements that the hon. Gentleman is making, which are simply scaremongering.

The amounts involved are in any case nothing in relation to the cost to the taxpayer that would result if the hon. Gentleman's party got the £395 million extra expenditure that it asked for last year. The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) at least had the decency to try to find a source for that money in that he indicated that it could come from the health service.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) should talk to councils and find out some facts rather than just feelings before he makes such reckless statements.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that compulsory competitive tendering has been of great benefit to local authorities in Clackmannanshire and elsewhere? Does he agree that in opposing CCT the Opposition have shown that they are much more interested in jobs for the boys than in value for money for the taxpayer or quality of service for council service users?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I find it unbelievable that elected councillors, who are elected to look after taxpayers' money and to try to provide services in the most cost-effective way, are so reluctant to put tenders out to competition not only to themselves but to the private sector. I should have thought that if by doing so they could gain savings for taxpayers in their area, they would have welcomed that. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that they do not recognise that competition brings improvement and better value for the taxpayer, although that is what they were elected to achieve.

Hampden Park Stadium

5. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will arrange to meet representatives of the Scottish Football Association to discuss funding of the final phase of the Hampden Park development. [38708]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): My right hon. Friend announced at Hampden Park on Wednesday 18 September that the Scottish Office would contribute up to £2 million towards the redevelopment and rebuilding of the national stadium.

Mr. Canavan: On behalf of the all-party Scottish sports group, may I thank the Minister for the Government's contribution which we hope will help to ensure that the Scottish football team and their supporters get the high-standard national stadium that they need and deserve? Will the Minister take this opportunity to congratulate the Scottish football team on their progress in the World cup, even though Scottish Tories may feel some empathy with Estonia since the Scottish Tory party with only 10 Members of Parliament cannot field a team in the House?

Mr. Robertson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and, indeed, to the all-party Scottish sports group for their kind words about our decision. I am sure that he will join me in congratulating Austin Reilly and the National Stadium Committee on their tireless efforts to ensure the funding necessary to match the lottery donation of £23 million from the Millennium Commission. That will ensure that Scotland has a world-class stadium for the new millennium.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I hope that we shall see world-class displays from the national team to match. I congratulate the national team on their brilliant performance in Latvia, where they put two past the Latvians, and against Estonia, when they showed that keeping possession and playing one-touch football really can win games. I am afraid that that match was a bit like Scottish questions—no opposition.

Forestry

6. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are currently employed by his Department on forestry matters; and what was the figure in 1990. [38709]

Mr. Kynoch: The Forestry Commission currently employs 3,600 staff throughout Britain, compared with 4,800 in 1990.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful and reassuring reply. May I also add my congratulations to those of my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) to Scottish Office Ministers on their efforts in securing inward investment to Scotland? Can my hon. Friend explain, however, why forestry is the specific responsibility of his office?

Mr. Kynoch: It is because there is a large amount of forestry in Scotland—*[Interruption.]* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland seems to be lapsing into my habit on previous questions from my hon. Friend by saying that perhaps at the Scottish Office we can see the wood for the trees.

Mr. Foulkes: That is a hard one to follow. Is the Minister aware that I warmly welcome the additional jobs in forestry to be created by the Egger chipboard factory proposed for my constituency and that I have personally thanked the officials from Locate in Scotland who helped to obtain that? Will the Minister be equally honest and frank about the unemployment figures? Is he aware that over the past three months the Labour party has carried out a door-to-door survey of every house in New Cumnock? The full detailed results, to be published tomorrow, show that the real level of unemployment in New Cumnock is well over twice the official statistics, and I am sure that the same is true throughout Scotland and the United Kingdom. Why do the Government not tell the truth about unemployment, just as I have been honest about Egger?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman gets very heated about these matters. Having visited that part of the world during the summer, I understand the difficulties when there is unemployment in an area, but that is all the more reason why we should concentrate effort on trying to bring new industry to the area. I welcome his comments regarding Egger. We are not quite there yet but, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the company has indicated that it wishes to build a new chipboard manufacturing plant at Barony, which is very good news for east Ayrshire. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), the hon. Gentleman should recognise that there have been other successes in his part of the world: we have brought the inward investment company AI(R) to Prestwick and we shall continue to make every effort to encourage further investment and to address the unemployment problems that I recognise exist in his area.

European Union Policies

7. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to visit the office of the representative of the European Commission in Edinburgh in the near future to discuss EU policies affecting Scotland. [38710]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None.

Mr. Dykes: Despite that answer, does my right hon. Friend agree that what strikes visitors from England about Scotland is the strong enthusiasm for United Kingdom membership of the European Union and the strong feeling that European Union membership has been good for Scotland in respect of specific policies? Will he finally overcome the hesitations that he has just demonstrated by persuading some of his English colleagues in the Government of the necessity of showing more enthusiasm for Europe and perhaps even considering the daring possibility of accepting the invitation to become a patron of the European Movement?

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. I have declined the invitation to be a patron of the European Movement because I would find it difficult to sign up to a series of proposals within its programme of objectives. As for his point about visiting the office concerned, my understanding is that the European Commission office in Edinburgh exists to promote the European Commission and is not concerned with matters of investment and manufacturing. I believe that Europe offers Scotland a tremendous opportunity as a Europe of nation states offering a market for our people, but I totally reject the view of a Europe of the regions that would reduce Scotland to regional status in Europe, which is the policy of the Scottish National party, the Liberal party and the Labour party.

Dr. Godman: When the Secretary of State next meets Mr. Kenneth Monro, the European Commission representative in Edinburgh, will he take the opportunity to discuss the repayment of the illegal payment of some £600,000 that was made to Tate and Lyle? Under European Union law, that money should not have been paid to that multinational which is quitting Greenock next year. May I remind the Secretary of State that on 26 June I wrote a letter on the issue to his hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), but that as yet I have not had the courtesy of a reply?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman says that he has not had a reply, and I apologise for that unreservedly. He shall have a reply this week. No, I will not be discussing the matters with the representative, because it is not really what he is there for and would not be relevant. Although I hesitate to fill up the diary of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), I am sure that he will be very happy to see the hon. Gentleman. I know how hard my hon. Friend worked to try to ensure that Tate and Lyle stayed in Greenock, where it had been for many years, and I know of the impact that that decision had on the community. I know that the hon. Gentleman worked very closely with my hon. Friend and the trade unions to do everything possible to try to maintain employment in the area. In that spirit, I am sure that, if the hon. Gentleman has not received a reply, it is certainly not through any deliberate intention.

Mr. Wallace: As one of the patrons of the European Movement in Scotland, I am disappointed that the Secretary of State has not joined us, but pleased that his right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade continues to subscribe to many of the European Movement's objectives.

If the Secretary of State is not prepared to go to the office of the European Commission's representative in Edinburgh, will he at least take the opportunity to engage with some of the European institutions with regard to two important Scottish industries—the fishing and fish farming industries—and specifically state what steps he is proposing to take forward the case against quota hopping? Will he ensure that we have substantial indigenous fish farming in future? That will require considering the imposition of duty on imports of fish farm products from countries such as Norway, which is dumping them, and not having to wait for a considerable period of time for a report of the European Commission's case on anti-dumping.

Mr. Forsyth: I would be very happy to be in any organisation with the hon. Gentleman, but I shall resist the invitation. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has always had a reputation for being somewhat more broad-minded than me on a variety of matters.

On the hon. Gentleman's serious points, he is of course absolutely right to draw attention to the importance of quota hoppers. We shall raise the issue at the intergovernmental conference. I am not sure whether people realise just how important the farmed salmon industry is to Scotland—certainly to the hon. Gentleman's constituency and the west of Scotland. My hon. Friend the Minister responsible for fisheries has been to Norway, entertained the Fisheries Minister in Scotland and worked hard with colleagues. The industry is fighting hard. It has our support and I share the hon. Gentleman's determination to tackle the problems. It is experiencing unfair dumping as a result of overproduction in Norway, which is putting it at risk. We must do everything that we can to support the industry.

Mrs. Ewing: Is not the Secretary of State having great difficulty referring to antecedents in the context of the European Movement because his heroine, Baroness Thatcher, was also a patron of it? Perhaps he would like to dwell on that.

On the points raised by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), will we have to wait on the Irish Government to fight for the fish farming industry in Scotland? What exactly will the Scottish Office say at the IGC about the common fisheries policy and the implications for the thousands of jobs in Scotland that depend on that industry?

Mr. Forsyth: I know that the hon. Lady has a constituency interest. If she would like to discuss the issues with me, I shall be very happy to do so. I am

surprised to learn that my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Thatcher is a patron of the European Movement. Despite that, I have no plans to reconsider my decision.

Mr. Day: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in Scotland's dealings with the European Union, as with those of all parts of the United Kingdom, when Germany east and west is united, it is essential that the components of the United Kingdom remain together in union, speaking with a single voice, rather than being picked off individually as separate units? For Scotland and England, is it not vital to be together within Europe, as with our dealings with the rest of the world?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree. The proposals for a Scottish Parliament envisage somebody shuffling down from Edinburgh to sit alongside the United Kingdom representative, who would be guided by decisions in this House. The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) has drawn attention to the importance of fishing and fish farming to Scotland's future. The idea that Scotland's representation should be reduced to someone who would not speak for Scotland's interest and would not have the power to carry the vote for Scotland's interests—

Mrs. Ewing: Douglas Hogg?

Mr. Forsyth:—would be deeply damaging to Scotland. The hon. Lady's position is better than that of the other Opposition parties in that respect, in that she wants an independent Scotland with its own representative—assuming that Scotland could then continue as a member of the Community. Unfortunately, as a small country dependent on the Community for support, our voice would be greatly diminished, as opposed to our being part of a United Kingdom with the power, the influence and the strong voice in Europe that has been our tradition, and is our future.

Mr. McFall: When the Secretary of State next decides to visit the office of the Commission in Edinburgh, will he do so in a spirit of contrition and humility in view of the anger and dismay expressed by the National Farmers Union of Scotland, Sandy Mole and others, about what they call the "bumbling shambles" of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy policy? In walking away from the Florence agreement, does the Secretary of State not realise that he is jeopardising 37,000 jobs in Scotland—as witnessed by the 300 jobs lost in Kilwinning last week? Is he not aware that the export of beef is crucial to the Scottish economy, so good relations with Europe are essential? Will he therefore stop relying on a policy designed to allay the fears of the Euro-sceptic wing of the Tory party at the expense of the fragile rural and farming areas of Scotland?

Mr. Forsyth: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman seeks to politicise an issue that is important for Scotland's economy. We are not abandoning the Florence agreement, and I do not believe that we would be able to stand up for the interests of Scotland's farmers, or of anyone else, by adopting the kind of policy suggested by the Leader of the Opposition, who has said that he would never be isolated in Europe. That means that he would never say no, and would never stand up for Britain's interests, for Scotland's farmers or fishermen, or for anyone else. The hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) is right to draw attention to the importance of the export business. That is why we shall continue to argue the case for Scottish beef, which is the best in the world and should have access to those markets. When I voted to join the European Community, I was told that I was voting for access to a single market for our producers. That is what we expect to have under the treaty, and that is what we intend to see delivered.

Scottish Grand Committee

8. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the impact of the work of the Scottish Grand Committee on the work of his Department in the current Session of Parliament. [38711]

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): Meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee fall within the parliamentary responsibilities of Ministers and the normal duties of officials.

Mr. Home Robertson: Is the Minister aware that, when my teenage son asked me whether the Scottish Grand Committee was a quango, I had to explain that it was nothing like as powerful as that? Will he confirm that the substantive decisions taken by the Scottish Grand Committee in all its travels round 11 locations in Scotland this year have been as follows: the Second Reading of the Deer (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill, the Second Reading of the non-controversial Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill, and no fewer than 24 resolutions "That the Committee do now adjourn"? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the time has come to adjourn that token Committee once and for all, and to allow the people of Scotland to elect their own Parliament to control their own affairs?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I wholeheartedly disagree with the hon. Gentleman. The Scottish Grand Committee has been an enormous success and has greatly improved accountability. Many positive decisions relating to areas throughout Scotland have issued from it. It has been responsive to representations from local communities. The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind the fact that his party's proposals for a Scottish Parliament would cost no less than £36 million in capital costs and well over £40 million a year in running costs. The running costs of the Scottish Grand Committee are negligible in comparison, and I believe that it performs a great service to the nation.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, despite what Opposition Members say, the movement of the Grand Committee around Scotland has been a great success? Cannot the Committee do almost everything that a Scottish Parliament could do—except raise the tartan tax? Does he agree that we should continue the policy this year? Perhaps we could end up with another great event in Dumfries this year—even if we do not have Robert Burns to celebrate in 1997.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the fact that the Scottish Grand Committee met successfully in Dumfries—it was

the first time that a Prime Minister had ever addressed the Committee. So successful was the experiment that it is now to be extended to Northern Ireland, and Wales is following our example. That is wholly admirable.

The tartan tax would be an appalling infliction and would probably mean that the average individual in Scotland would pay £6 a week extra in taxes, which would damage jobs and services.

Mr. Welsh: Apart from the extra cost of making some hon. Members travel more, how much has the travelling circus cost? What has been the impact of the Grand Committee on the Scottish Office, given that the Committee cannot make any decisions about anything?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: If the hon. Gentleman is saying that he and his colleagues have no influence, he is incorrect—as long as they are doing their jobs properly. Hon. Members who operate effectively and use the parliamentary machinery available to them can have great influence on behalf of their constituents. The costs of running the Grand Committee are negligible in comparison to the cost of a Scottish Parliament, and the people of Scotland will keep that in mind.

Mr. Davidson: But what has the Scottish Grand Committee actually done?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It has met on a great many occasions. *[Laughter.]* What is more, it has listened to many representations—some of them from the hon. Gentleman who, if I remember correctly, argued for stronger action to be taken by the Law Officers against drug dealers and vandals in his constituency. We were glad to respond to the problems in his area.

Government of Scotland

9. **Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the government of Scotland. [38712]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have had lots of representations on the government of Scotland, and in particular about the adverse effect of a tartan tax that would hit the work force and pensioners in Scotland harder than those in other parts of the UK.

Mr. Duncan Smith: If a Scottish Parliament with tax-raising powers were created, would not my constituents in Chingford be right to question the funding arrangements whereby the United Kingdom Government would spend more per head in Scotland than in England? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that would lead directly to a schism between England and Scotland, and thereby to exactly what the Scottish National party wants—a separate England and a separate Scotland?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend to the extent that Labour's unstable proposal would lead to conflict between Westminster and the Edinburgh Parliament and that funding would certainly become an issue. The supporters of this policy include the Liberal Democrats, who have argued for a reduction in the number of Members of Parliament and the loss of the office of Secretary of State for Scotland, which would diminish Scotland's voice in this House, where the funding of Scotland's vital services is determined. That in turn would put those services at risk, and is a recipe for corrosive acrimony and discord.

My hon. Friend is right to say that that move would play straight into the hands of members of the Scottish National party, who seek the break-up of the United Kingdom. I hope, therefore, that Opposition Members who realise that will ask those Labour Members who adhere to the scheme to think again.

Mr. McAllion: In a recent speech, the Secretary of State denounced nationalism as "patriotism gone to seed", among other things. Will he denounce that form of British nationalism that wraps itself in the Union flag, indulges in blatant anti-European sentiment and displays not so much love of our country as loathing of the countries of other Europeans? If not, can we conclude that he is a secret supporter of that ugly face of British nationalism that is associated with the Euro-sceptics in his party?

Mr. Forsyth: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman is reading my speeches. He will have seen that, in the same speech, I described patriotism as being based on love of one's own country, not hatred of other people's. The hon. Gentleman can take my words for what they are. He has sometimes had difficulty deciding whether he is a nationalist or a socialist.

Mr. McAllion: Both.

Mr. Forsyth: I will not link both because that might get me into some trouble. In that speech, I was drawing attention to the failure of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) to condemn a recruiting leaflet produced by young Scottish nationalists which denounced English people in filthy and abusive terms. He has refused, and he has the opportunity to do so this afternoon.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: On the question of Scottish governance, and given the Secretary of State's announcement last week of the inaugural meeting of the highlands and islands convention, could I indicate to the Secretary of State on behalf of my hon. Friends in the area that we look forward to participating in that meeting? I must also place it on record that we will at the outset raise the question of the convention deciding for itself who should act as the chair and of it having ownership of its agenda. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is absurd to have a consultative body to the Executive that in itself will be chaired and driven by the person in charge of the Executive?

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman takes that attitude, it will not work. We have tried to set up a body made up half of elected members and half from other bodies. The purpose is to come together with my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for the highlands and me to discuss issues that we can approach on a cross-party basis. It is meant to be not an Executive, but a consultative, body. If the hon. Gentleman wants to be in the chair, he must win the next election.

The convention is not set up as some sort of Executive body. It is there to try to find common ground and ensure that those people, both elected and unelected, in the

highlands have an input. The hon. Gentleman's ambitions go beyond that. I hope that he will adopt a co-operative attitude. Many people in the highlands would welcome that. I appreciate that he would rather have something else, but that is not something that I am in a position to deliver and it would not be the right thing to do.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the most effective and efficient mechanism for a Government with a majority of Scottish Members of Parliament—if they are determined to have a body legislating in Scotland—is to use the Scottish Grand Committee and their majority in it? In such circumstances there is no need to set up other, expensive establishments.

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. In a Scottish Grand Committee under a Labour Government—perish the thought—a majority of members would be of the Government side, otherwise there would not be a Labour Government. That means that the Grand Committee would be able to pass legislation, hold the Executive to account and do everything and more that a Scottish Parliament could do. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State pointed out earlier, the only thing that it could not do is raise the tartan tax. Too many people are keen to pay extra tax in Scotland compared with England.

Campbeltown to North Antrim Ferry

11. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the tourist potential for Scotland of the proposed ferry from Campbeltown to North Antrim. [38715]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is difficult to make a precise estimate of the benefits, but I am certain that the new ferry service will be of enormous tourism benefit to Campbeltown and the west of Scotland as a whole. I also believe that it will be of benefit to Northern Ireland and that it opens up the possibility of people doing a round trip and seeing parts of Scotland and Ireland that might otherwise be less accessible. I pay tribute to the way in which the hon. Gentleman has worked to make the project a success.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the statement by the Secretary of State. The project has gone beyond the proposal phase and should be in operation next summer. We welcome its linking of the kingdom of Dalriada and I am glad that the Secretary of State agrees that it will release Campbeltown from an experience, at times, of isolation and make it part of a through route for tourism, to our mutual benefit.

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and to the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), who also played a part. My only regret is that it took so long to bring the matter to fruition. Those who have followed the project realise that it took so long because there have been serious difficulties in achieving it, but it has been worth fighting for and I am glad that it is on course to start next summer.

Mrs. Ray Michie: I, too, welcome the announcement, at long last, of the ferry service, although I am disappointed that Caledonian MacBrayne was not allowed to run it. It will nevertheless make a significant difference to Campbeltown and to the Kintyre peninsula. For how long does Sea Containers have the contract? Is the Secretary of State expecting the service eventually to run all year, so that we can build up not only a good tourist service, but a good import-export service?

Mr. Forsyth: I shall take the hon. Lady's point about CalMac head on. I spent a considerable time this summer going around islands, and in her constituency. The unique circumstances in those areas and the importance of ferry services are perfectly apparent. We must consider the support that we provide through CalMac for ferry services for the future.

It was important for the new route to be established. It was possible to achieve that with a private sector operator taking the risk, which means that CalMac's available public capital and running costs can be deployed on maintaining other services and introducing new ones. It must be the right approach to use the state nationalised service and the scarce resources available to it as wisely and as effectively as possible. That was what lay behind our thinking.

I must confess that I am not immediately au fait with all the details of the contract, but I shall write to the hon. Lady and if she has any concerns, I shall be pleased to consider them.

Mrs. Liddell: Hon. Members of all parties welcome the new ferry service, which will link two beautiful parts of the British Isles, but is not it absurd that the Secretary of State for Scotland cannot give a convincing reason why public assets have been gifted to a private company, Sea Containers, when CalMac would have been perfectly capable of running the service as it did in the past? Will the Secretary of State admit that he is so in thrall to his narrow right-wing ideology that he is prepared to gift to a private sector company public assets at the taxpayer's expense?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Lady should take a week off to read the speeches of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), as she is talking old Labour. She is arguing that, when a private sector operator is prepared to provide finance, purchase the ferry and take the risk on its working—even the most enthusiastic supporters have questioned its viability—we should ask the taxpayer to do it instead. That is nonsense. We should use taxpayers' resources as wisely as possible. The resources that we have for CalMac should be used to run the services that the private sector cannot run.

Dermatology Patients

13. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hospital beds are available in Scotland for dermatology patients. [38719]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: At 31 March 1996, 207 beds were available and, in the year to that date,

nearly 13,000 treatments for dermatology were carried out. That was 27 per cent. more than in the previous year.

Mr. Martin: The dermatology unit in Stobhill hospital is excellent and serves communities as far away as Falkirk, but the worry is that the beds are being taken away and it is my understanding that those requiring a bed will have to go to the Western infirmary. May I urge caution, because some of the hospital trusts, although they mean well, are trying to operate their hospitals as slick business operations, when first and foremost they should look after the interests of the patient?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I should explain to the hon. Gentleman that there have been some changes in clinical practice, including the introduction of a great deal more day care, which has been successfully introduced at Stobhill. There has been consultation. The health board is now purchasing in-patient dermatology services from the Western infirmary, where bed capacity has been increased. Glasgow is well provided with dermatology beds, having approximately four times as many in-patient dermatology beds per 100,000 of population as London. Overall, the hospital trusts are sensitive to the point made by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Connarty: Is the Minister aware that the all-party group on skin, which is very active in the House and of which I am an office bearer, has been looking into dermatology services? I am deeply concerned that the type of in-patient provision described by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin), when someone undergoes tar treatment for severe skin disorders, is the only time that they can spend among others suffering the same disease. Relaxation is very important. Day care is no substitute for the relaxation that comes from week-long stays in hospitals such as Stobhill.

The Minister seems to ignore the fact that the service provided at Stobhill is for nearly all of Scotland, not just for Glasgow. It is for people in my constituency and many others in Scotland. It is not sufficient at the moment and should be expanded, not cut down.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: If there are complaints about clinical practice, I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would give me the details, which I shall investigate. There has been an increase in out-patient facilities at Stobhill. Since the date of transfer of services from Stobhill catchment area, only a handful of patients have required in-patient treatment at the Western infirmary. Out-patient treatment has increased. If there are cases of dissatisfaction with clinical decisions, I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would let me know.

Stone of Destiny

14. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the future location of the Stone of Destiny; and if he will make a statement. [38720]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have received a number of representations on the location of the Stone of Destiny on its return to Scotland, including from my hon. Friend.

Mr. Walker: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Can he confirm that no final decision has yet been reached and that the proposals for a kingship centre and for the stone to be located at Scone are still in the running?

Mr. Forsyth: I can confirm that no announcement has been made; I hope to make one shortly. The announcement will take full account of the representations made by my hon. Friend, in particular his proposal for a kingship centre at Scone.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: As the other Member of Parliament representing Perthshire, may I add my voice to those who have called for the stone's ultimate return to Scone, where it of course belongs? When that great symbol of Scottish nationhood is returned, will the Secretary of State also consider the return of some of the realities of our nationhood?

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her representations. The important fact is that the stone will return to Scotland on the 700th anniversary of its removal. I am sure that its place in Scotland will be more permanent than the hon. Lady's place in Perthshire.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Will the Secretary of State admit that there is really only one place for the Stone of Destiny to rest—in the capital city of Edinburgh? Will he assure the House and the people of Scotland that, wherever the Stone of Destiny is lodged, it will be accessible to as many people as possible, and certainly to people with disabilities?

Mr. Forsyth: The criteria that need to be met for the placing of the stone were set out fully in the consultation paper. We have received a number of representations, although I am not aware that the hon. Gentleman made one. I can see that he is now doing so from a sedentary position. I promise that I will revisit the representations before making an announcement.

Deregulation

15. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new deregulation initiatives he intends to introduce in the next six months. [38721]

Mr. Kynoch: The Scottish Office will continue to take action on all aspects of the Government's deregulation initiative.

Mr. Steen: While I pay tribute to the Secretary of State's well-known commitment to promoting the Government's policy of deregulation, does my hon. Friend agree that the test for the Government is how many rules and regulations that impinge on business they have repealed, rather than to argue that, but for the Government's deregulation policy, there would have been even more statutory instruments? Since January 1994, there have been 8,101 statutory instruments.

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He will appreciate that much business legislation is United Kingdom-wide legislation, and therefore the responsibility of other UK Departments. I can assure my hon. Friend, however, that we in the Scottish Office are adamant that we will reduce the burden on industry and encourage business in Scotland. That is something which the Opposition parties are totally against, because all their proposals for business in Scotland are counterproductive, counter-competitive and would be bad news for Scottish business, and, therefore, Scottish employment.

Mr. Ernie Ross: How can anyone take the Government seriously when, of the 3,500 regulations that have been introduced and directly affect manufacturing industry, 2,625 have been introduced by this Government?

Mr. Kynoch: That is absolutely nothing, as the hon. Gentleman may realise in due course, compared with the burdens his party would put on Scottish business and United Kingdom business. I shall name but a few—the social chapter, the minimum wage and the tartan tax. They would all be exceedingly bad news for Scottish business, UK business and the people of Scotland.

Dunblane (Cullen Report)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the publication of the report of Lord Cullen's inquiry and the Government's response.

On 21 March, following a resolution of both Houses, I appointed the Hon. Lord Cullen to inquire into

"the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the events at Dunblane Primary School, to consider the issues arising therefrom, to make such interim and final recommendations as may seem appropriate and to report as soon as practicable."

Lord Cullen concluded that he should not make an interim report. He completed his report within the demanding timetable he set himself by the end of September. But I received a letter from the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) saying that it would be

"wrong for the Report to be published during any one of the party conferences".

I discussed that request with him, and with the hon Members for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), and with their approval I requested Lord Cullen to delay submitting his report to me until Monday 14 October. It is being published today, together with the Government's response, as a Command Paper. I can also tell the House that the report will be available on the Internet, so that there will be access around the world for those who expressed support for the community of Dunblane.

I am also grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for your agreement that I should allow the families of the victims to receive copies of the report and the Government's response ahead of its presentation to Parliament.

I am enormously grateful to Lord Cullen for the dedicated, prompt and efficient way in which he has carried out the inquiry. I appointed him in the knowledge of the careful way in which he conducted the Piper Alpha inquiry and the rigour and the practicality of his conclusions on that occasion. He approached the present inquiry with sensitivity, courtesy and care. As the inquiry proceeded, he deservedly gained the wide respect of the parties to the inquiry, the media and the public. He has had to consider the most harrowing of circumstances, and to acquaint himself with a number of very complex issues—issues which are of great concern to the people of Dunblane and throughout Scotland.

It was right for there to be a full investigation of all the background to the events of that day and of the policy questions raised by them. And it was essential that the House had before it a full analysis and the facts before attempting to reach conclusions about further action.

I can tell the House that we are going to accept all Lord Cullen's recommendations, and in some respects intend to go further. Many of the recommendations relate to firearms legislation for which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has lead policy responsibility. He will be making a statement about that immediately after mine.

Lord Cullen's report describes in detail the tragic events of Wednesday 13 March. The gunman, Thomas Hamilton, entered Dunblane primary school shortly after 9.30 am and made his way to the gymnasium armed with two 9 mm Browning self-loading pistols and two .357 Smith and Wesson revolvers, together with 743 rounds of ammunition—all of which he lawfully held, and which he legally kept at home, together with more than 1,000 further rounds of ammunition. Within three or four minutes, he fired 105 rounds with the 9 mm Browning, resulting in the deaths of Mrs. Gwen Mayor and 16 children, and injuring a further three teaching staff and 14 children. He then used the .357 Smith and Wesson to take his own life.

Of the head teacher and his staff, the report says that they

"did everything that they possibly could to assist, far beyond what might reasonably have been expected of them".

Lord Cullen also commends the general quality of the work of Central Scotland police and, in particular, the individual officers involved. He records the gratitude of the relatives and the school authorities for the help, support and professionalism of the force. From my own experience on that day, and on the days that followed, I reinforce those tributes.

Lord Cullen is, however, critical of the delay in providing information to victims' families. Those criticisms were accepted by the chief constable of Central Scotland police, who made a written submission to Lord Cullen, identifying procedural inadequacies and suggesting improvements, which Lord Cullen has endorsed. The Government will ensure that those issues are discussed with police forces throughout the United Kingdom.

An ambulance and a team of doctors and nurses from the local health centre were quickly on the scene. The health service's major incident plan was implemented, and a number of expert teams from Stirling and Falkirk royal infirmaries went to the school. The report highlights the magnificent way in which all the health teams responded. The victims were taken to Stirling royal infirmary and Falkirk and District royal infirmary. The most seriously injured were later transferred to Yorkhill children's hospital. The professionalism of all concerned undoubtedly saved lives.

The report sets out the facts about Thomas Hamilton and his background, and Lord Cullen has considered, with expert advice from a psychologist and a psychiatrist, what may have prompted Hamilton's atrocious act. He concludes that

"the violence which he used would not have been predictable".

Hon. Members will want to study the report for themselves, but I conclude that this was an act of calculated wickedness.

Lord Cullen's report considers in great detail the granting and renewal of the firearms licences that Thomas Hamilton had held since 1977. He points to the weaknesses in the system used by Central Scotland police for the carrying out of inquiries and the making of decisions about firearms applications.

In particular, the report is critical of the former deputy chief constable of Central Scotland police, Mr. Douglas McMurdo, who was appointed earlier this year to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland. I thought it right that Mr. McMurdo should have sight of the relevant paragraphs in the report, and he has today offered his resignation, which I have accepted. He has informed the Scottish Office that he also intends to resign from Central Scotland police. The House will respect his decision.

[Mr. Michael Forsyth]

The report makes two recommendations, which I have accepted, concerning improvements in school security. I will be introducing a specific grant to assist authorities to improve the security of school pupils and staff, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment will be doing likewise in England. All authorities will benefit, and I intend that councils should have as much discretion as possible on the measures to be taken.

I expect such measures to be in line with the action plans that Lord Cullen encourages individual schools to draw up. They will add to the measures that the Government announced in May in response to the recommendations of the working group on school security.

Two further recommendations, which I have accepted, concern the vetting and supervising of adults working with children and young people. One concerns the development of a Scottish vocational qualification in respect of work with children, including the organisation of clubs and child development and protection. The other involves accreditation, by a national body, of clubs and groups involved with young people. That body would ensure that there are adequate checks on the suitability of leaders and workers with unsupervised access to children and young people.

I also intend to introduce legislation at the earliest opportunity to allow all youth organisations access to criminal records, and to certain other information that does not relate directly to criminal convictions and is held by the police. I appreciate that that may cause concern in some quarters, but I believe that the safety and protection of our children must come first.

The whole country has been struck by the courage and dignity with which the community of Dunblane has worked together in the aftermath of this terrible atrocity. That community now looks to the House for rapid and united action.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, and join him in thanking Lord Cullen for his report, and for the patient, thorough and painstaking way in which he conducted this important and sensitive exercise. The wide-ranging issues that he has examined and has made recommendations on emphasise the wisdom of holding this sort of inquiry, and I look forward, with my colleagues, with more time available, to examining in detail what he says.

I also express my personal gratitude and thanks to the Secretary of State for Scotland for the genuine kindness and consideration that he has shown to myself and to my wife during and after the tragedy—a tragedy that took place in the small town of Dunblane, which he represents and where I and my family have lived for over 20 years.

On 13 March, we were two rival politicians with politics utterly forgotten in the shadow of unspeakable evil and tragedy; two fathers united in total grief at the horror that we were to witness, and perhaps recall for ever, in a school that we both knew so well; two men, members of the human family, united then and now in an overriding conviction that this massacre, involving 16 tiny children and their brave, dedicated teacher, or anything like it, must never, ever, happen again.

That must, of course, remain the starting point for approaching any of the recommendations in Lord Cullen's report today and in the days ahead. Let me make it clear that I fully appreciate the feelings that the Secretary of State for Scotland must have experienced in these past seven months as he tried, as indeed I had to do myself, to reconcile strong personal feelings with an obligation to make the right decisions on changes to the law of the land.

I now turn to the detailed recommendations in the report. As the Secretary of State has said, Lord Cullen deals in some detail with the handling of the incident on the day, and, as he acknowledges, there was here an incident of unprecedented scale, involving such horrifying carnage that no one could have been fully prepared to deal with it, still less one of Britain's smallest police forces.

Mistakes were clearly made, the most serious one of which was the treatment on the day of the parents of the dead and of the injured. Lord Cullen says that this was unacceptable. Central Scotland police and the chief constable have acknowledged the fault, and have apologised to those who were concerned, but it is a lesson in human handling which must never be lost.

Is the Secretary of State aware, though, that what comes through from the harrowing description in this report of the events of 13 March is the remarkable, indeed inspirational, performance of the school staff—especially the head teacher, Ron Taylor—and the whole range of medical services, emergency services, and indeed individual police officers, all of them local, all of them traumatised and all of them emotionally connected to the victims? Their heroism and professionalism in the face of the most terrible events imaginable should never be forgotten by us.

Lord Cullen deals in his report with the circumstances whereby Thomas Hamilton continued, in the face of rising concern about him, to get his gun licences renewed; this is a matter of real importance to those, like myself and the Secretary of State and many others, who long campaigned against Thomas Hamilton. Lord Cullen makes the point:

"On balance . . . there was a case for revocation"

which

"should have been acted upon",

but he goes on, pointing up the need for serious reform in this area, to say that the eventual outcome would have depended on the outcome of the appeal to the sheriff, which he had no doubt that Thomas Hamilton would have taken. Lord Cullen's conclusion, setting aside the great wisdom of hindsight, is:

"It is not certain that an appeal would have been unsuccessful."

Certification changes are now being proposed, and the means by which Thomas Hamilton got his gun licences and continued to hold them must not be used again. Deputy Chief Constable McMurdo, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, has today taken responsibility for what he did. His resignation is an example of honour, but the system has to change.

On school security, Lord Cullen makes the valid point:

"It would be unacceptable to carry measures to the point where schools were turned into fortresses."

We agree with that, and with the point that varied school layouts and geography do not easily lend themselves to a simple formula. The recommendation of an action plan for each school on the points that Lord Cullen identifies

is right. I commend the right hon. Gentleman's announcement, both on its speed and on the promise of funding for that recommendation.

On the vetting and supervision of young people, I welcome Lord Cullen's recommendations and the Government's acceptance of them. Lord Cullen underlines the sadly deficient present situation when he says:

"There was no system in general use for the vetting of persons who operated such clubs or for monitoring their conduct."

The establishment of a new registration body will be a major step in the direction of placing hurdles in the way of future Thomas Hamiltons, without deterring genuinely motivated people from helping with youth clubs. The Secretary of State has our support for the new qualification in that area and for the procedures on police information.

Decisions about how we deal with the lessons of Dunblane are helped immeasurably by Lord Cullen's wise analysis and recommendations—but the buck stops here, with the lawmakers of this country. It is up to us to make the final judgment, and then to be judged on that. We have to act decisively and urgently, and the Opposition will co-operate fully in what needs to be done.

I know that firearms are to be the subject of a separate statement, but I feel it necessary to make one point. I warmly welcome the shift by the Government to an almost complete ban on handguns. They were right to listen with care to the force of public opinion.

Given that they have already come that far, I urge the Secretary of State and the Government to take that final but fundamental step towards the eradication of handguns in our country. There is no place in any decent civilised society for handguns of any sort. Let us therefore resolve that the lasting legacy of the evil that visited Dunblane on 13 March will be the complete outlawing of handguns, so that that sort of atrocity can never, ever, happen again.

Mr. Forsyth: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) for his kind words. I echo the tribute that he paid to the performance on that day of the emergency services and—although there have been criticisms of the police—of individual police officers, which was inspiring.

I agree that there are issues relating to the appeal to the sheriff for refusal of licence certificates. Those issues are addressed in the Cullen report, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will respond on that.

I also agree that we must do what we can to make schools secure, but we must not turn them into fortresses. They are schools—they are places where our children should be safe, but they should feel as open as possible to the wider community.

The hon. Gentleman referred to a shift in the Government's position. I have been determined that the Government's position should be decided only when we had the Cullen report. The Government's position was decided yesterday at a meeting of colleagues, where a paper was presented jointly by me and by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. There has been no shift in our position—which represents our considered view, having considered Lord Cullen's recommendations. It is important that the House should be aware of that.

I agree that it is important that we should be seen to act speedily, and I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support. I believe that the package of measures that will be presented to the House today represents the right answer. The package represents a proper, balanced response, and I very much hope that all hon. Members will be able to deal with it quickly and with as much unity as possible.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Will my right hon. Friend accept that he has gained tremendous respect and praise across Scotland—as has the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson)—for his handling of this tragedy since that fatal day last March? I warmly accept Lord Cullen's recommendations—although, obviously, we have not had a chance to examine them in detail.

From the evidence and from what my right hon. Friend said, it seems likely that, had the proper procedures been carried out, Hamilton would never have had a firearms certificate. Will my right hon. Friend tell us how he hopes to improve co-ordination between the police, the procurator fiscal, social workers and others, so that doubtful cases can be vetted and this type of incident never happens again?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my right hon. Friend. The report details the shortcomings in how the licence application was granted and renewed. It also points out, as the hon. Member for Hamilton said, the difficulties that arose because of the uncertainty surrounding the possibility of a refusal being overturned on appeal to the sheriff.

The report contains specific recommendations dealing with the presentation of information and the tests that should be applied on appeal, which go a long way towards meeting my right hon. Friend's concerns. As I have already said, we have accepted all of the recommendations, including those relating to the matters about which my right hon. Friend is concerned.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I join the Secretary of State in acknowledging the task fulfilled by Lord Cullen, and the meticulous and sensitive way in which he conducted the inquiry and prepared this important report on a most awful and tragic event. I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute again to staff and the emergency services, many of whom acted well beyond the call of duty.

I am sure that the Secretary of State will agree that Lord Cullen's report should be studied with great care, not only by hon. Members but by the public.

Liberal Democrat Members welcome the fact that the Government have accepted the recommendations. I am sure that the Secretary of State would acknowledge that, in instances in which the Government want to exceed Lord Cullen's recommendations, they are more in line with the submissions made by Liberal Democrat Members to Lord Cullen. I assure the Secretary of State that he will have our co-operation in the necessary legislation.

While the Secretary of State acknowledges that there may be concern in some quarters about legislation on making available access to information on criminals, and perhaps on those who have not been prosecuted, will he consult on the detail of that legislation? We share his view that schools should not become fortresses, and that fortresses are not suitable places for the upbringing and education of children. We welcome the fact that resources will be made available to help schools to implement action plans.

[Mr. James Wallace]

Although Lord Cullen identifies weaknesses in Central Scotland police in how they processed firearms applications, does the Secretary of State accept that the current law, even without further legislation, allows for a much more rigorous approach to the consideration and granting of firearms applications? Will he tell us what action has already been taken to bring that to the attention of police forces across Scotland?

Mr. Forsyth: On the latter point made by the hon. Gentleman, I am sure that there is not a chief constable in Scotland who has not examined this issue very carefully after the event. I agree with the hon. Gentleman in his analysis of the state of the law. Far be it from me as an ordinary mortal to disagree with a lawyer on Scots law.

I agree with the more general observations by the hon. Gentleman. He asked whether I would consult on the specific issue of making available to youth organisations information that the police hold that is other than about criminal records. I realise that this is, of course, a sensitive issue, but in situations in which we are dealing with the protection of children, the balance lies with tilting away from the civil liberties of the individual. I should be happy to discuss with him the criteria that will be applied and how that will operate.

One matter that comes out very clearly from the report and the analysis of Thomas Hamilton's background is that information was not communicated because he had never had a criminal conviction, although there had been several instances in which a prosecution was considered but did not proceed because of a lack of evidence.

That information would be of value to organisations thinking of employing people who would be acting in an unsupervised capacity with young children. I am certainly happy to discuss that with the hon. Gentleman. I greatly welcome his positive approach to the matter and his saying that he will support the Government's proposals for legislation when they are brought before the House.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): Is my right hon. Friend aware that every hon. Member is with him on this difficult day, as he has to make a statement on the appalling event in his constituency? Will he confirm that, when considering the laws affecting the supervision of young people and children, account will be taken of the fact that bodies such as the Scouts, the Boys Brigade and the cadet forces will probably fall within the scope of organisations dealing with children, as they recruit at quite a young age? Will their position and structures and the way in which they do things be taken into account when the law is being formed?

Mr. Forsyth: We shall, of course, consult on the proposals; indeed, the Government's response gives a commitment to do so. It is important that all youth organisations can have access to a database that provides information about individuals across the United Kingdom. That is what we mean to achieve. Of course, if my hon. Friend has any particular suggestions, I should be very pleased to take account of them.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): On behalf of the Scottish all-party group on children, I should like to welcome what the Secretary of State said about the regulation of voluntary bodies and the vetting of volunteers. Can he say anything about the regulation of summertime play schemes which tend to be of shorter duration than those of usual bodies? If he cannot comment now, is it something that he will be sure to consider when drawing up his plans?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Lady follows these matters in detail. She will confirm that we said that we would defer further consideration of that matter until we had studied Lord Cullen's report. I have had an opportunity to raise the issue with officials, and we hope to be able to reach a final conclusion. but, in the light of the Cullen report, it is very unlikely that we shall take the deregulatory road that we originally intended.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) on the dignified way in which they have proceeded, especially as this must have been so harrowing for both of them. It was entirely right to set up the Cullen inquiry and that it should have the blessing of the whole House. It was also right that we await the outcome of that inquiry before making judgments. I welcome the attention that my right hon. Friend has given to school security and the vetting of youth workers, but may I express regret that, to an extent, in the run-up to the publication of the report, the wider arguments have been lost to the issue of gun control?

Mr. Forsyth: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend. I know that one or two people have questioned whether Lord Cullen's report was necessary; once people have had an opportunity to study it, I think that they will know the answer to that question. Lord Cullen sets out in great detail the facts and the background, and I think that that is the best basis on which to take decisions about the variety of policy issues that have arisen.

Of course gun control is an important aspect of that, but there are other, wider issues that matter to thousands of organisations and literally hundreds of thousands of people across the country. It is right that we approach the matter with a clear and critical analysis of the facts carried out by a man of Lord Cullen's quality. At the end of the day, my hon. Friend is right: it is for the Government to take a decision about what is required, but it is best to do so with the type of report that Lord Cullen has presented.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): Will my right hon. Friend accept that hon. Members representing constituencies far from Scotland are equally grateful to him for his speedy response to the report placed before us today, and that we are also grateful for the fact that we have had so succinct a report? I have not had a chance to read it in detail.

Does my right hon. Friend accept that the essential now is that energy is given to the establishment of clearly defined security procedures for each school and educational institution in Scotland and in the rest of the United Kingdom to provide for the safety and protection of children and of staff, which is a matter of everyday interest and concern?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend, but I think that Lord Cullen is right to emphasise the importance of

individual schools looking at their own circumstances and working out what is required. It is difficult centrally to prescribe particular standards that will apply to every school. Every school, like every child, is different, and the remedies that need to be applied need to be looked at on a school level.

The remedies also need to be proportionate if we are to maintain the quality of schools, and it is for local authorities to work with the schools to achieve that task, and for grant-maintained schools and others to address the matter directly. The specific grant that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and I propose will assist local authorities in that task.

I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that Lord Cullen has addressed the issues in a sensible way, and that he has been greatly assisted by the work done by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in the earlier part of this year, much of which is already being implemented.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth and Kinross): I join the Secretary of State in expressing admiration for Lord Cullen, and for all his work over the summer in respect of the inquiry. There are a great many recommendations which will undoubtedly gain widespread support. Notwithstanding the Secretary of State's statement, I must ask whether he personally agrees that the case for a total handgun ban has been made over the summer, and that to fall short of that and to exempt any number of handguns would leave far too many of those weapons in use.

Mr. Forsyth: As the hon. Lady knows, the firearms issues will be dealt with by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. On the hon. Lady's direct question, she will know that my personal position has been that we should have the Cullen report and should consider the recommendations in that report, and that we should then decide what the way forward was.

I draw the hon. Lady's attention to the section of the report that suggests how we should consider the issues in terms of what is proportionate, where the balance of interests lies and how we address the issues of safety. My right hon. and learned Friend will shortly set out the Government's conclusions, which I fully support and which I presented to my colleagues with him.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): With regard to the penultimate paragraph of the Secretary of State's statement, on the vetting and supervising of adults who care for children, will he confirm that that would embrace adults who are representatives of Church bodies and local authorities and who are in loco parentis for children, many of whom are vulnerable and far removed from their parents?

Mr. Forsyth: Yes, I think that I can confirm that point, although I did not quite catch the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question. The general purpose is to provide a means whereby people can obtain information as to the bona fide nature of organisations. Clearly, if people are in loco parentis, others are entitled to information about them. I think that that was the hon. Gentleman's question. I apologise if I have not got it right, and I am happy to have a word with him afterwards about it.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Having myself lost a child aged five—although it was in a motorway crash, which is not quite the same—I know that no one who has not been through such a tragedy can quite understand what it is like. Perhaps that gives me some right to sympathise not only with what the Dunblane parents have suffered, but with their need to campaign for a change in the law, as I felt I had to do over seat belts in cars.

Is my right hon. Friend aware that, despite some people's entirely understandable impatience, nothing whatever has been lost by the fact that it was bound to take some months for Lord Cullen to report? We now need to pause, hesitate and study, and to make quite sure that we get the change in the law absolutely right.

Mr. Forsyth: It is certainly true that the summer recess has enabled Lord Cullen to produce his report. Of course we all sympathise with my hon. Friend. I cannot imagine what it is like to lose a child, and we all sympathise with the parents. There are also wider issues involved, concerning the protection of our community and our attitude towards firearms, which my right hon. and learned Friend will address. I believe that the country will look to the House to take the necessary steps to provide legislation so that our communities are safer as quickly as can be achieved. We can achieve that if we have a united response throughout the House of Commons.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Is not the dreadful truth that such a tragedy was bound to happen, given the total inadequacy of the Government's response to a similar shocking event in Hungerford? [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I do not believe that the people of Dunblane will forgive us for being mealy-mouthed about this. Is the Secretary of State aware that, since 1983, the Government have resisted suggestions that all police forces in the United Kingdom should use a standard inquiry form when people apply for shotgun certificates or licences? Will he now give the House an undertaking that he will raise the issue in the course of his consultation with the police throughout the United Kingdom?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman has not had an opportunity to read Lord Cullen's report. He will find that Lord Cullen concludes that the actions of Thomas Hamilton were unpredictable. I recommend to the hon. Gentleman that he reads the report and looks at the considered arguments. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will be happy to discuss his concerns with him.

Cullen Report (Firearms)

4.6 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I join my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and other hon. Members in paying tribute to the community of Dunblane for their courage and dignity. I also join them in thanking Lord Cullen for the sensitive way in which he has undertaken his difficult inquiry and for the report that he has produced.

I hope that the House will forgive me for the length of the statement that I am about to make. I am sure that the House will understand that it deals with complex and important matters.

The proposals that I am about to set out will apply to England, Wales and Scotland. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is carrying out a review of firearms law in the Province and will be issuing a statement this afternoon about the possible implications for gun control in Northern Ireland arising from Lord Cullen's report.

Among all the words that have been written since that dreadful event at Dunblane, there is one irrefutable fact. The crimes that were committed on 13 March were committed with a gun that was legally bought and legally possessed. Those facts place an extremely onerous duty on the Government to consider what controls there should be on the ownership and possession of guns.

I agree with Lord Cullen that it is right that we should concentrate on handguns, although some of my proposals will affect all gun owners. Handguns are not used for shooting game and are easily carried and concealed. Many are weapons derived from military or police models or are intended for self-defence—a purpose that is not accepted in Great Britain as a reason for possessing a gun. I agree with Lord Cullen that there are compelling grounds for imposing stringent restrictions on their use and availability.

Lord Cullen has made 23 recommendations for strengthening the regulatory controls on the ownership and licensing of all guns. We accept them all. The Government's detailed response has been placed in the Library. There are seven recommendations for improving the way in which the police handle all applications for firearms certificates, a further eight recommendations deal with the grounds for obtaining a firearms certificate, and eight recommendations are about the suitability of individuals to hold firearms.

I draw particular attention to the following recommendations: in future, anyone applying for a firearms certificate should be assessed against a checklist of criteria for suitability, a clear burden should be placed on the applicant to show that he is fit to have a gun, a new power should be created to enable the police to revoke a certificate where there is no longer a "good reason" for having a firearm, and the grounds on which an appeal against the refusal of a certificate can be made should be significantly limited. Taken together, those 23 recommendations add up to a drastic strengthening of controls on gun ownership.

In addition to Lord Cullen's proposals, we intend to introduce four further measures. First, we shall make it a requirement for all handgun shooters to obtain a certificate in order to fire a handgun at a gun club. Secondly, we shall make it an offence to fail to notify the police whenever a firearm or shotgun is sold, transferred, deactivated or destroyed. Thirdly, we propose to ban the sales of guns through the post. In future, it will be unlawful to transfer a gun from one person to another, except in person.

Fourthly, one of the most shocking and distressing features of the tragic events in Dunblane was the use of expanding ammunition, which is designed to cause the maximum injury. There is no possible justification at all for it to be available for people whose only authority is for target shooting. In future, therefore, it will be illegal to possess expanding ammunition except for the purposes of shooting deer, in accordance with the Deer Act 1991.

I come to the question that I know will be of greatest concern to the House and the nation: the controls on the ownership of handguns. Lord Cullen confines his suggestions to self-loading pistols and revolvers of all calibres. He does not consider that further restrictions are required for single-shot handguns, which he would allow to be kept in the home, as at present. He suggests that owners of multi-shot guns should be required to disable them when keeping them at home, and goes on to say that, if after consideration those arrangements are found not to be practicable, there should instead be a ban on the possession of multi-shot handguns by individual owners. He envisages that it would still be possible for guns to be kept by a club secretary so that target shooting could continue, using guns owned by the club.

The Government have taken advice from the Forensic Science Service on the practicability of Lord Cullen's suggestions for disabling handguns. Lord Cullen himself recognised that there were considerable practical difficulties in removing key components from handguns. The Forensic Science Service has confirmed that view. It is also not convinced that a barrel block—Lord Cullen's other suggestion—could be made that someone with sufficient determination and access to metal-working tools could not remove. As a result, I have come to the conclusion that we cannot recommend that approach to the House.

I therefore come to Lord Cullen's alternative suggestion of banning multi-shot handguns from individual ownership. I propose to go considerably further than Lord Cullen has suggested in two respects. First, we shall ban all handguns from people's homes. I do not agree with Lord Cullen that it would be safe to allow single-shot handguns to remain in the home. I believe that they should be subject to the same controls as those imposed on multi-shot handguns.

Secondly, we shall outlaw high-calibre handguns of the kind used by Thomas Hamilton. Low-calibre handguns—.22 rimfire handguns—will have to be used and kept in licensed clubs. We believe that a distinction needs to be made between high-calibre handguns, which are principally made for police and military use, and .22 rimfire handguns, which are largely intended for target shooting. Although Lord Cullen decided against making such a distinction, he sets out in paragraph 9.49 of his report a table that demonstrates that a .22 handgun is some four to six times less powerful than higher-calibre handguns.

In paragraph 9.44, Lord Cullen points out that the expansion in the use of high-calibre handguns has even made many shooters concerned about the use of such guns

as symbols of personal power. In addition, target shooting with .22 handguns has been an Olympic sport since 1896. There will be exceptions for the very few professionals, such as vets, who need handguns outside gun clubs for the humane destruction of animals.

The proposals will mean that at least 160,000 handguns—80 per cent. of those legally held at present—will be destroyed. Appropriate compensation will be paid.

The clubs in which it will still be possible to use .22 handguns will be subject to the most stringent security standards. We shall consult as a matter of urgency chief constables and other interested parties on the details of the standards, and we shall set them out clearly in guidance. In addition, every individual club will need to be approved by the chief constable of the area in which it is situated. Handguns will be able to be removed from a club only for strictly limited purposes, which will be specified in law, and under the most stringent controls.

Few, if any, existing gun clubs will be able to meet those requirements. When the powers become law, we shall therefore require any owner of a .22 rimfire handgun to hand his gun to the police for safekeeping until he is able to find a licensed club that he can join. We shall then provide a period for clubs to improve their security, and to be inspected and licensed. Some handgun clubs may never be able to achieve an adequate level of security. If so, they will have to close.

The Government consider that those are the minimum acceptable conditions for the continuation of handgun shooting in Great Britain.

Breaches of the conditions for the safekeeping of handguns will be criminal offences. In 1994, the penalty for possession of a prohibited weapon was increased from seven to 10 years' imprisonment. Illegal possession of a higher-calibre handgun will therefore carry a maximum penalty of 10 years' imprisonment. We intend to create a new offence of possession of a .22 rimfire handgun outside club premises. The maximum penalty will also be 10 years.

The package of measures that I have announced today will give this country some of the toughest gun control laws in the world. We shall ban all handguns from the home. We shall outlaw completely higher-calibre handguns such as those owned and used by Thomas Hamilton. We shall require .22 rimfire handguns to be kept in gun clubs under conditions of the most stringent security. And we shall drastically strengthen the rules under which firearms certificates are granted. Those proposals will lead to the destruction of 160,000 handguns—80 per cent. of those legally held today.

I believe that the priority for Parliament should be to put the measures on the statute book at the earliest possible moment. So I intend this month to publish a Bill giving effect to them. I urge the Opposition parties to support that Bill. I am confident that if they do, it could have Royal Assent by Christmas. The country expects nothing less.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I thank the Home Secretary for his statement, and for the arrangements that he made to allow my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), myself and other Opposition Members to have sight of Lord Cullen's report and the Government's response this morning.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton said in his statement, we are all deeply grateful to Lord Cullen for the thorough way in which he carried out his inquiry. It was right to establish the inquiry and to seek Lord Cullen's advice. But as Lord Cullen states at the outset of his report, he makes only recommendations. The ultimate decisions on such crucial matters of public safety are for Parliament to determine.

All of us have been profoundly moved by the grief and courage of the bereaved parents of Dunblane and their families and friends, and by the power and dignity of the Snowdrop campaign mounted in the wake of the atrocity. But is it not the case that often sympathy and concern are not enough by themselves? Thomas Hamilton was the man directly responsible for this appalling tragedy, but surely we all must accept our responsibility for permitting an environment of such lax gun control. Surely, too, we must acknowledge that we failed after Hungerford to put in place the controls necessary to reduce significantly the risk of such an event happening again.

Is it not the case that Dunblane and Hungerford were only the most extreme illustrations of the failure of the current system; that the number of licensed handguns has risen rapidly; that crimes involving handguns have more than doubled in the past 10 years; and that almost every day there are reports of licensed gun owners abusing the privilege that they have been granted?

As we heard from the Secretary of State for Scotland, Thomas Hamilton—one man—killed 16 children and one teacher, and injured 17 others, by discharging 105 rounds of ammunition from a single semi-automatic handgun in the space of three minutes. Handguns are small, portable, easy to hide and lethal. In the light of Lord Cullen's report—and especially his analysis—it is our considered judgment that handguns should be banned altogether from general civilian use.

May I make it clear to the Secretary of State that we shall of course co-operate fully to ensure that legislation is passed speedily through Parliament, to implement the will of this House and the other place for a root-and-branch reform of gun law? We welcome almost everything in the Secretary of State's statement, and especially the complete ban on all handguns from people's homes. But, with respect, we do not believe that his proposals go far enough. Let me briefly give our reasons.

In the evidence submitted to the Cullen inquiry on behalf of the Labour party by my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton and me, we said that there was a strong case for banning all handguns, apart from some very limited occupational exceptions such as vets and casualty slaughterers. We then said that it was for the shooting fraternity to make a case for exceptions to that—for example, in respect of single-shot .22 pistols. But, in our judgment, the shooting fraternity has failed to do so.

Lord Cullen says that an exemption for single-shot .22 handguns would be both impractical and ineffective because they could easily be reconverted to multi-shot guns, and we accept that view. Partial bans, moreover, would create extra work for the police. As the Police Federation said in its evidence to Lord Cullen, .22 weapons may be just as lethal as higher-calibre weapons.

The problem with the compromise on clubs proposed by the Secretary of State is that there will still be 40,000 handguns, including many semi-automatics, remaining in

[Mr. Jack Straw]

private ownership—albeit for use in clubs. I am aware that the Secretary of State proposes tight new controls on the gun clubs that are allowed to remain. Is he not aware of a most compelling case made against the halfway house by the British Shooting Sports Council in its evidence to the inquiry, in paragraph 9.68 on page 121? Referring to the crucial issue of the booking out of weapons, even with tighter controls, the BSSC said:

"no matter what system of checks and paperwork is maintained in such circumstances, it would be a simple matter indeed for a shooter intent in recovering his guns to enter a competition, provide evidence to his club secretary that he had done so, recover possession of the complete gun together with ammunition for it, and perpetrate an outrage".

In the light of that evidence not least, I ask the Secretary of State to think again about the proposal to allow the licensing of some gun clubs before the Bill is published.

The Government have made welcome proposals for the licensing and appeals systems in their statement. May I press on the Secretary of State the case for a blanket ban on all mail order sales of weapons, for a total ban on replica and deactivated guns, which the police have called for, for air weapons to be controlled within a licensing system and for the age limit for any sort of guns to be increased to 18?

On the radio this morning, the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) proposed that Ministers should produce alternative clauses to the proposed Bill to give effect to such a total ban and allow a free vote on it. Since such a vote would emphasise the non-partisan approach to the issue that we all seek and would not delay the legislation, may I endorse both calls that the right hon. and learned Gentleman made and ask the Secretary of State for his response to both?

Nine years ago, our nation was similarly repulsed by the consequences of the slaughter of innocent people in Hungerford by a lawfully licensed gunman. Our actions then failed to match what was needed. Is it not the case that today we owe it to the victims of both Hungerford and Dunblane not to fail again?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the remarks with which he began his observations. He identified with some precision the difference that lies between us. We believe that it is possible to give the public the protection that they rightly require and deserve without going so far as to put in place a complete prohibition on the ownership and possession of handguns for which the hon. Gentleman called. We believe that if it is possible to provide that protection without a complete ban, it is the Government's duty to take that course.

I ask the hon. Gentleman and those sitting behind him to reflect on the unhappy history of the complete prohibition of activities hitherto regarded as lawful. It would not be in anyone's interests, least of all the protection of the public, to drive underground an activity that could then be conducted without any safeguards for security, whereas if it remains possible to carry out that activity legitimately, under extremely secure safeguards, the public's protection might be greater. I ask him to reflect on that.

The hon. Gentleman raised a number of other matters. I do not think that there is anything between us on mail order sales. The position on replica guns is that it is extremely difficult to find a satisfactory definition for such weapons. We have said more than once that if such a definition could be provided, we would be more than content to consider that possibility.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, a free vote is not a matter for me; his observations will have been heard by those whose responsibility that is. I do not think that it would be appropriate for the Government to publish a two-clause Bill—a Bill with alternatives—as he has suggested and as was suggested on the radio this morning by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor). I believe that it is for the Government to come to their considered conclusion as to the right way forward and to put that in the Bill to be placed before Parliament. It will of course be open to any hon. Member to table an amendment to its provisions.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Every reasonable person in the land will want to congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on seeking, with the support of everyone in the House, to tighten the procedures by which people can lawfully get possession of guns of any kind. Will he also bear it in mind that the Home Affairs Committee identified the fact that one of the worst problems is the flooding into this country of hundreds of thousands of illegal weapons and, particularly, that nearly every crime committed with guns is committed with a gun that no one has ever lawfully possessed? Will he bear it in mind when he considers legislation that further action will need to be taken not only on lawfully held handguns, but on the hundreds of unlawful guns that come into people's possession through our ports, if incidents such as that at Dunblane are to be avoided?

Mr. Howard: My hon. and learned Friend is entirely right to identify the dangers that we all face from illegally held weapons. It would be an utter delusion to suppose that we are affording the community complete protection by putting in place more stringent safeguards on the use of lawfully held weapons. The problems posed by illegally held weapons are considerable and we are, and will continue to be, extremely vigilant and do all that we can, especially to prevent the importation of such weapons.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the Home Secretary accept the following proposition, the importance of which was underlined by the slaughter at Dunblane? In this country, we regard the possession of guns not as a right, but as a privilege that has to be carefully controlled and safeguarded to protect public safety and public confidence. As the Government's proposals have much common ground with our proposals to the Cullen inquiry, will the Home Secretary note that we are prepared to support and facilitate legislation based on those proposals, as long as the House has an opportunity to consider on a free vote whether a ban on 80 per cent. of handguns is adequate and workable or whether it is necessary to go further?

Under the Government's proposals, who would be allowed to transport guns between one gun club and another or from a gun club to a competition? Does the Home Secretary agree that it would be wrong to pretend that either the proposals or a total ban provided any

guarantee against the misuse of guns leading to a slaughter such as that at Dunblane, so vigilance and effective and well-resourced policing remain essential?

Mr. Howard: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman's first proposition, that there is no right to hold a gun under our laws and that it is a privilege. I agree with that approach and I note what he said about his party's approach to the legislation.

On the transportation of guns from one club to another under the proposed arrangements, we intend to have consultations with chief constables and others about the details but, as I said in my statement, we envisage that it should be permitted only in the most limited circumstances and under the most stringent controls. For example, the transportation should be effected not by the owner of the gun, but by a third party specifically authorised for that purpose.

I entirely agree with what the right hon. Gentleman said about illegally held weapons and about the need for continued vigilance to deal with that very considerable problem.

Mr. David Mellor (Putney): I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his statement, which contains many valuable insights. I should like to put two points to him. First, as he has concluded that there is a case for permitting single-shot .22 pistols only under rigorous conditions, which will take an enormous amount of time, effort, trouble and expense to enforce in order to keep the so-called sport going, is it not time to conclude that literally and metaphorically the game is up for handguns now, and that that is the public will?

Secondly, I am glad that my right hon. and learned Friend attaches importance to as far as possible keeping all Members of the House together in the effort to provide an effective solution. Will he consider again the merits of putting forward alternative proposals, as has often been done on contentious and difficult pieces of social legislation in the past, given that he knows that the real issue is whether to go 80 or 90 per cent. of the way, as he proposes, or 100 per cent. of the way? He should lay alternatives before the House and the matter should be dealt with on a free vote. With the greatest of respect to my right hon. and learned Friend, I do not believe that some of his loyal supporters should have their loyalties tested by the imposition of a Whip on the matter.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. and learned Friend has made his views on the subject known in his usual forceful manner from an early stage. He has put two particular points to me, to which I have already given a response. I do not follow him on the first, for the reasons that I gave in answer to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). I do not follow him on his second point, because it is for the Government to come to a conclusion as to the right way forward and to incorporate their decision in a Bill. As for the question of a free vote, that is not a matter for me.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I thank the Home Secretary for endorsing the main plank of the minority report from the Home Affairs Committee on the issue. It is not every day that a minority report is endorsed so swiftly by the Home Office. I have one or two others that he might like to reconsider.

Did the Home Secretary hear the comments this morning by Mr. Michael Yardley, a firearms expert, that it was pointless to ban handguns if something was not also done about shotguns? Is it not about time that we made a start on collecting some of the 2 million shotguns in circulation, starting in urban areas? Everyone acknowledges that farmers need shotguns, for reasons that we all know about, but it is hard to understand why licences should be granted to shotgun owners in urban areas.

Does the Home Secretary have any plans to do anything about the misuse of air weapons, which, as many of our colleagues will know, are responsible for a great deal of mayhem in urban areas?

Mr. Howard: I note the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks. I am sure that he does not expect me to give any undertaking on my reaction to minority reports from the Home Affairs Committee in future. I do not follow the hon. Gentleman in his observations about shotguns. Shotguns have many wider applications than do handguns, which are restricted to target shooting. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has made a case for the restriction on shotguns to which he has referred. Similar observations apply to air rifles.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I realise that what I am about to say may be unfashionable, but after we pass all this legislation, surely criminals and madmen will still get hold of guns. Surely we as a Conservative Government are about protecting the rights of law-abiding minorities, even if we do not agree with them, and about protecting the rights of private ownership. What we have heard today is extremely worrying. It is worrying to appoint a judge and then go much further than he suggests, after he has given such exhaustive consideration to the issues. It is worrying to store so many more guns in arsenals. Above all, it is worrying that we are accepting the view that wickedness lies not in the individual's heart but in a group of people who are in the main highly law-abiding and simply want to pursue their sport. It is a worrying situation.

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that a considerable problem arises out of illegally held guns. I have said on a number of occasions this afternoon that that is something in respect of which we must be extremely vigilant. I hope that my hon. Friend will reflect on the contents of the Cullen report and on my statement today, as well as on the way forward which the Government believe to be right in the circumstances. I look forward to discussing those matters with him and I hope that, on reflection, he will reconsider his position.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): As one who can empathise and sympathise with the families who have lost children and who replaced a Member of the House who was shot by a handgun, I understand the emotion surrounding the issue. I welcome the Home Secretary's statement, but I suggest that the emphasis of the previous statement is the most important because it is placed on the human element. If I read the proposals correctly, I understand that the suggested changes might improve the legislation here and bring it more into line with legislation in Northern Ireland, but there is another problem, that of illegal weapons. It does not seem right to curtail

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

law-abiding people's ability to use something properly under licence, when, at the same time, we miss the point that illegal weapons will be used by people for their own purposes.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman's remarks, which are based on his particularly unhappy experience, command considerable respect, and we shall pay them that respect. I hope that I have already made it abundantly clear today that we do not in any way overlook or belittle the seriousness of the damage that can be done through the use of illegal weapons.

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Will my right hon. and learned Friend amplify his proposals for compensating the individuals who currently own weapons that are legally held? How will that compensation be calculated? Has he made any estimate of the cost to the taxpayer of the compensation package?

Mr. Howard: It is very difficult to make any accurate estimate of the total cost of the bill. We intend to compensate those who hold guns that will be unlawful as a consequence of the measures announced—higher-calibre handguns—on the basis of the market value of those guns before I made my statement this afternoon.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): The Home Secretary will recall that on 3 May last year I introduced an Adjournment debate to control specifically the use of handguns. It sickens me to the pit of my stomach that it has taken the death of 16 children and a brave teacher to bring us to today's decision. Having said that, I welcome some of the moves that the Home Secretary has made, but I implore him to go that extra mile, as suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw).

Mr. Howard: I understand the strength of the hon. Gentleman's feelings and I know that they are shared by many. I have endeavoured to explain the reasons for the position that I have advanced to the House and I have no doubt that it is something we shall debate in the weeks ahead.

Sir Michael Spicer (South Worcestershire): My right hon. and learned Friend and his colleagues in Cabinet have had to strike a difficult balance on this matter. I particularly welcome what he said two minutes ago, about compensation for those who have perfectly legally bought expensive items and who find them now taken away from them. I also particularly welcome what he said about giving compensation based on the market value. Would he include items that were not included the last time the matter arose—expensive accessories such as safes, unspent ammunition and various other things?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his opening remarks. I shall certainly consider the points that he made. His second point is important, and I hope that he will forgive me if I do not give him any kind of assurance now, but it falls for consideration.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The Home Secretary has announced a stringent package of controls, but however rigorously controls are enforced, they always leak. A great deal therefore turns upon the perhaps exceptional occasions when a gun finds itself in the hands of someone whose purposes are malign. That being so, so much turns upon the actual characteristics of the weapon.

One of the horrific features of Dunblane and the other event that occurred years before was that it was not just murder; it was a massacre. That massacre was possible only because of the rapid-firing nature of the guns that were in the possession of those who committed those crimes. If the .22 were a weapon that could be fired only with a single shot and not rapidly fired, the Home Secretary's case would be stronger. If, as we heard earlier, it cannot be turned into a single-firing weapon but is a weapon that fires rapidly, so that in the hands of wicked and evilly disposed people it can be used to commit mass killings, the Home Secretary should think again and go for a total ban.

Mr. Howard: The right hon. Gentleman draws attention to the implications of the distinction that I made, and to other distinctions that may be made. I believe that, in the end, it is a matter of judgment. Earlier, I explained the judgment that caused me to advance the proposals that I placed before the House, and I believe it to be the right judgment. I do not believe that the factors that the right hon. Gentleman has drawn to the House's attention represent the whole picture. It is necessary to look at other aspects and other implications, and to take seriously the dangers that would arise from total prohibition if the activity were driven underground.

It is a matter of judgment. I believe that the judgment that I put before the House this afternoon is the right one, but I have no doubt that we shall continue to debate this matter.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): It is not the guns that are the problem; it is the people who use those guns illegally. Regrettably, the Home Secretary's statement means that the sins of this awful, deranged individual will be paid for by the many thousands of legitimate, decent and honest people who enjoy not a so-called sport, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) put it, but a leisure activity that has great historic traditions and which they enjoy. The measures that he announced will be received with great dismay. He has got it completely the wrong way round. He is affecting many, many innocent people because of the awful, awful acts of one awful, awful madman. I think that he is wrong, and that his legislation will not be accepted by the majority of decent, honourable people in this country.

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend. A great many decent and honest citizens take part in target shooting. I do not, on behalf of the Government, advance these proposals lightly. Much of what my hon. Friend said is right. But the Government have a responsibility to consider all aspects of the matter, and to decide to what extent it is sensible to take measures that restrict the ability of those decent and honest citizens to engage in activities that they regard as perfectly reasonable, so as to increase the protection to which the public, as a whole, are entitled. That is the basis on which I approached this

difficult decision. I agree with much of what my hon. Friend said, but for those reasons I reach a different conclusion.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Does the Secretary of State agree that a child's right to life is far more important than any adult's so-called right to carry a handgun, even for so-called sporting purposes? How many more Hungerfords and Dunblanes must there be, and how many more children must die, before the Government implement a complete ban on all handguns along the lines of early-day motion 1238, which is supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House?

Mr. Howard: Of course, I agree with the hon. Gentleman's first question—I imagine that not one single hon. Member would disagree with that—but it does not follow that we agree with his conclusion. I believe that we can provide the public with the protection to which they are entitled without going as far as introducing a complete ban. That is the point at issue between us, and no doubt we shall argue about it in the weeks ahead.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): In his report at paragraph 9.55, Lord Cullen speaks about the assessment of risk, and I want to ask my right hon. and learned Friend about two points regarding the "chances of harm".

During the summer, I had the opportunity to visit several clubs and to talk to members, and it became clear to me that procedures, standards and security vary enormously among clubs.

First, will my right hon. and learned Friend give an assurance that, before someone who holds a target pistol can rely on the basis of being a member of one of those clubs, the security that my right hon. and learned Friend outlined in his statement will be in place, so that all clubs reach a high standard? Secondly, an integral part of target shooting is entering into competition. Those competitions are known and well established. Will my right hon. and learned Friend be laying down the particular competitions that count?

Mr. Howard: I can certainly give my hon. Friend the assurance that he sought in the first part of his question. The security standards of clubs where shooting will continue to be permitted will be extremely stringent. We shall consult chief constables about those standards and lay down those standards in guidance. Not only will clubs have to comply with the guidance, but they will have to satisfy the chief constable for the area in which the club is situated that the standards that will apply in the club will be adequate.

As for the second part of my hon. Friend's question, we intend to prescribe in order those competitions that will enable guns to be transferred from one club to another, under the very stringent controls to which I referred earlier. We envisage that that should be restricted to national and international competitions, but we shall consult on the details.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I have read every paragraph of the Cullen report, and I thank the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland for their courtesy in making it available to me and my colleague earlier today. Can the Home Secretary confirm 40,000 as the number of handguns that potentially will still be available for use under the proposals that he announced today—not only single-shot weapons, but rapid-fire weapons and multi-shot weapons? I understand that the Japanese Government licensed 58 handguns for sporting purposes last year. Is it not possible that the Japanese Government have it right and the British Government have it wrong?

Finally, will the Home Secretary reflect again on the call that has been made from all parts of the House to allow a free vote on the issue—a vote that is about public safety, and which must be a matter of individual conscience because it could involve life and death? Perhaps, in his reply, the Home Secretary will say that he will do the right thing on the free vote and allow every Member of Parliament to vote according to his or her conscience.

Mr. Howard: The estimate of the number of guns that the hon. Gentleman gave may be broadly right, but I anticipate that many people who use such guns at present will not do so in future, as a result of the stringent security standards that we shall insist on putting in place for the clubs where that activity will continue to be legal. The other points that the hon. Gentleman raised were not new, and I have no new answers to give him.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North–West Norfolk): Is the Home Secretary aware that the vast majority of the shooting community, including hundreds of people in my constituency, are very conscious of grave public concern about this subject? Is he aware that they obviously expect, as he says, a drastic tightening of controls? Is he further aware that they probably also expect, and will go along with, the toughening of security at gun clubs, even though in my constituency it will probably lead to the closure of one or two of those clubs?

Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many people in the countryside, including farmers, wildfowlers and gamekeepers, who will now rightly fear for their sport, expected the Government to implement Cullen, and will need a lot of persuasion that the Government are right to go beyond Cullen? Can he confirm that he will carry out the widest possible consultation with those interest groups?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the qualified support that he gave to some of the measures that I proposed. I understand the anxieties that he expressed, many of which I believe to be misplaced having regard to the details of the proposals that I have made, but I would always be ready to meet delegations of the people whom my hon. Friend mentioned, to do my utmost to allay their fears.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I thank the Home Secretary for his positive proposals on the licensing of guns. Does he accept that they have come far too late for the children of Dunblane and for Douglas McMurdo, the deputy chief constable, who was only reacting to the signals that he received from the Government after Hungerford and from the courts—especially the ombudsman who gave Hamilton permission to continue to run his youth clubs? If the right signals had come out after Hungerford, we might not have had the Dunblane incident.

[Mr. Michael Connarty]

I have some sympathy, which I have already expressed, with the right hon. and learned Gentleman's view on Olympic shooting, but it appears to me that the Japanese Government have the numbers right. The Government are talking about having 40,000 guns in the possession of individuals—even if the guns are kept in clubs—just so that we can have a sport. I suggest that for many of those 40,000, shooting is not a sport, but thrill seeking. That is what gun possession is about to them; it is not about trying to reach the highest attainment in an Olympic discipline.

How many guns can each individual hold, even if they are kept at a gun club? I suggest that the proposals put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) were the start of the march away from the gun culture—a march that must end with asking why people hold shotguns for occasional shooting. The Government's proposals are simply a march up a blind alley for the people of Britain.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman's question about the former deputy chief constable of Central Scotland police is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, not for me. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman would not expect me to comment.

I have answered the hon. Gentleman's other comments during my contributions to this afternoon's proceedings. The important thing is the stringent security under which guns will be kept in the clubs—that is the key.

Mr. Connarty: How many guns?

Mr. Howard: As long as the conditions in which they are kept are of the utmost security, the number of guns owned by any individual is a secondary matter. The important thing is the security of the conditions in which they are kept—that is what I regard as being of supreme importance and that is what will be set out in the guidance that we provide.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): While expressing every sympathy for the agonising decision that my right hon. and learned Friend and other Cabinet colleagues have had to make on these difficult matters and not yet having seen the Cullen report myself, I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to consider—not least because of this afternoon's debate—allowing a free vote. This is not a conventional piece of party political legislation—it is a primordial matter of humanitarian, social and family concern for the whole country. The more they think about it, the more the Government will be obliged to consider the real importance of a free vote on the relevant clauses that we have been discussing this afternoon. Will my right hon. and learned Friend, through the usual channels and with Government colleagues, ensure that we act in the only way that will satisfy public requirements?

Mr. Howard: As I have said several times this afternoon, that is not a matter for me. It is the responsibility of Government to come to a conclusion on matters such as this and to enshrine that conclusion in a Bill that they place before Parliament. It is then for Parliament to express its view.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement as far as it goes, although—like many of my right hon. and hon. Friends and my Labour colleagues on the Home Affairs Committee—I do not think that it goes far enough. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware that there is a shooting range and a gun club here in the House of Commons, despite there being no creche and no provision for children. That shows that this House has its priorities wrong. Is the effect of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's statement that members of that gun club will store guns on these premises? If so, does he consider that to be unacceptable? Should not the House set an example by banning all guns from the House of Commons?

Mr. Howard: Whether, as a matter of law, it will be possible for guns to be stored on the premises of the House of Commons gun club will depend on whether the club complies with the security requirements that we have yet to put in place. Whether, as a matter of practice, the House decides that that should continue to be the position is not a matter for me.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. As the statement has taken almost an hour, we shall now move on to the ten-minute Bill.

Scottish Parliament

4.59 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): It is difficult to turn our thoughts to other matters after today's sombre statements, but I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to introduce a Scottish Parliament in accordance with the scheme proposed by the Scottish Constitutional Convention.

The first and greatest reason for creating a Scottish Parliament is that the people of Scotland want democracy. That is reason enough for change. Time after time, however, our democratic will has been denied by the Government, who are so determined to thwart us that they will even attempt to overcome the will of the people by means of the hereditary peerage. What could better illustrate the difference between those who want to advance democracy and those who will do anything to resist the advance of democracy? Those who want to resist the advance will not succeed, and, instead, they are likely to hasten the end of mediaeval baggage that a modern democracy should have left unclaimed long ago.

It will not be long now before a Scottish Parliament is meeting for the first time in almost three centuries. A Scottish Parliament will not be a return to the far-off, undemocratic days, when only a privileged minority could determine its actions. It will also not be a copy of Westminster. A Scottish Parliament will make advances in our democratic system, putting it in the forefront of change, and I hope that it will encourage Westminster to follow where it leads.

This is not the dry stuff of constitutional tinkering, remote from people's lives. We want a Scottish Parliament because it will make a difference to our lives. In election after election, Scotland has consistently demonstrated a desire for its collective and community traditions to be respected and acted on by selected representatives. We feel increasingly frustrated as our wishes are consistently disregarded. A Scottish Parliament, however, will be underpinned by the specific consent of the Scottish people, and it will place power in our people's hands to decide how our public services—such as health, education and housing—will be delivered, how our laws and administration of justice will be determined, how our economy will be boosted and how our cultural and artistic life can be shared and enjoyed by all.

None of that does any harm to our neighbours and friends in the rest of the United Kingdom, and it is rank dishonesty to pretend that it does. People who wrap themselves in the Union flag to defend the current negation of democracy are merely demonstrating that they have no clothes. As for the so-called "tartan tax"—which was mentioned again today at Scottish questions, as if Conservative Members thought that they had latched on to a stout argument—the Scottish people know that they will have that degree of power only if they vote for it. If they had been able to vote on VAT on domestic fuel or on the poll tax, to name but two Tory taxes, those taxes would have been thrown out with all the contempt that they deserve.

I have been involved with the Scottish Constitutional Convention since it was founded in 1989. I am proud of the way in which it has carried forward the debate, not only on what a Scottish Parliament will do but on the way in which it will do it. The convention has devised plans for how a Parliament will carry out its work, which will create openness and accountability. I believe that Westminster will be able to learn a great deal from how that Parliament conducts itself in the future.

The Members of the Scottish Parliament will reflect Scottish society. For the first time in any elected body in Britain, we shall see the equal representation of women and a fair reflection of the ethnic minorities in our society. A Scottish Parliament is worth fighting for to achieve those objectives alone. I remind the House that only 24 women have ever represented a Scottish seat in Westminster. As one of that small number, I look forward to the day when women in Scotland will have an equal share in making the decisions that affect our daily lives. If anyone thinks that we shall be deterred by a hereditary peerage, whose claim to rule is based on ancestral encounters on the battlefield or in the bedroom, they are about to be disabused of that notion.

Time is too short today to be able to describe all that we plan to achieve in a Scottish Parliament. If there is anything that I want for my constituency from a Scottish Parliament—I know that I speak for many others—it is jobs. I want secure and decently paid jobs, and an end to the poverty that blights so many of our people's lives. Thousands of our people live in inadequate housing, while building workers are idle and investment in housing declines. What a way to run a country!

We know a better way, and it will not be long now before we achieve it. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.4 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): The hon Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) started off by suggesting that the people of Scotland want a democracy—which means, I suggest, an assembly. Labour Members told us that back in 1979. At that time, the people of Scotland failed to register sufficient interest—sufficient interest even by the standards of the Labour party. Labour Members abandoned their ideas then, and apparently they are abandoning them now.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Maryhill on having the courage to present the Bill, because I believe that it cuts across her party's current policy—policy recently adopted and thrust upon the Scottish leadership. I recognise that that policy has not necessarily been signed on to, and that if "Islington Man" changed his mind tomorrow, the Scottish Labour party would follow along.

Obviously the Bill was prepared before the recess, when the hon Lady's Scottish boss, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), was proclaiming:

"We will have up and running a Scottish Parliament within a year of the Labour party taking office."

That could be a long way away. In fact, there is nae chance of that ever happening. There never was a chance of it, and it will be most unlikely under the referendum scenario now on offer.

The Bill was prepared at a time when the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) was repeatedly telling us that never again will Scottish legislation be determined at Westminster. Such farcical comments are not untypical of the hon. Gentleman.

The Bill was prepared at a time when the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) believed that he was the Opposition spokesman on constitutional change. We all

[Mr. Phil Gallie]

respect him for his beliefs, because we know that he holds them conscientiously. Quite honestly, I do not often agree with his beliefs, but at least he adheres to them. It must have been galling for him to discover that there had been a policy change on this key election issue, and for him to be informed of the change by the leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats. That incident does not say much for Labour, and it demonstrates its unfitness to govern. Obviously hon. Members in the shadow Cabinet do not discuss issues of vital importance with so-called "junior shadow Ministers".

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): Speak up.

Mr. Gallie: I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman cannot hear me; I shall try.

The fact is that the Labour party in Scotland is not in control of this issue, because it is being decided in Islington. The shadow Secretary of State for Scotland has, to some extent, been abandoned. He has submitted meekly to instructions from those above him, although some people would say that he has done so bravely, because he attempted to take responsibility for the change of heart on the referendum fiasco. Once again, however, he was undermined by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who has claimed full responsibility for the referendum decision.

On a day on which the House will be considering matters of honesty, Labour Members should examine a little more carefully the matter of honesty in their party, on their home ground. The Bill presented today by the hon. Member for Maryhill seems to be detailed. In effect, it demands that its passage through the House be set in train.

If the Scottish Constitutional Convention scheme is to be followed, there will be no referendum. With the return—if ever that were to happen—of a Labour Government supported by the Liberal Democrats, a tax-raising assembly would be imposed along the lines that Opposition Members will no doubt press in the general election campaign. If there was any honesty in their approach, surely they would be prepared to debate the issues in the general election campaign and, if they came to power, to follow through what they believed to be the right course for Scotland.

The Opposition's tax-raising assembly would impose a 15 per cent. tax increase on Scots who could least afford it. That would surely be unwise. In my constituency, I sent out 17,000 questionnaires to people of all political affiliations. To date, almost one third have been returned, of which 85 per cent. oppose the tartan tax, 4.3 per cent. support it and the remainder simply back an independent Scotland. That is an honest position, which I respect, although I do not support it.

Another survey carried out by "Newsnight" in my constituency showed that 12 out of 13 people questioned were against a tax-raising Scottish Assembly. Those are the views of the Scottish people, which they believe that the Conservative party in Scotland will have the guts to get out and fight for in the next general election. We shall stick to our principles, not abandon them as Opposition Members seem to have done.

As to a tartan tax, the idea of a Scottish Parliament opens up other threats. Already, we have heard Opposition Members querying the rights of local authorities to impose additional taxes on business. Conservative Members fought for the uniform business rate. A Scottish Parliament would put that in jeopardy and Scotland would be the worse for it.

The Bill refers to Scotland alone. The hon. Lady has ignored Wales and England. If a tax-raising Parliament is right for Scotland, why should there not be one for the regions of England and for Wales? She knows that that would not be wanted by the Labour party in those parts of the United Kingdom, where people are much saner than those on the Opposition Benches.

I am amazed that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) supports the Scottish Constitutional Convention's intention to introduce proportional representation. He has fought against proportional representation for many years, and rightly so: it is undemocratic and ensures that the party hierarchy will appoint those who represent the nation in such a Parliament.

If Labour Members support the Bill, they are cutting across the wishes and desires of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield and stabbing their leader in the back. That would be entirely inappropriate. On that basis, I ask the House to reject this stupid Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 132, Noes 46.

Division No. 216] **[5.13 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Ashdown, Paddy
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Benn, Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cunningham, Dr John
Cunningham, Ms R *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David

Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Morris, Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Robert
Short, Ms Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Maxton and
Mr. Norman Hogg.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Eggar, Tim
Gallie, Phil
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Harris, David
Hawksley, Warren
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jessel, Toby
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Neubert, Sir Michael
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Sumberg, David
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Whittingdale, John

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bill Walker and
Mr. John Marshall.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Mr. Jimmy Hood, Mr. David Marshall, Mr. Brian H. Donohoe, Mr. Eric Clarke, Mr. Ernie Ross, Mr. William McKelvey, Mr. Mike Watson, Mr. George Foulkes, Mrs. Ray Michie, Mrs. Alice Mahon and Mr. Harry Cohen.

Scottish Parliament

Mrs. Maria Fyfe accordingly presented a Bill to introduce a Scottish Parliament in accordance with the scheme proposed by the Scottish Constitutional Convention: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 190.]

Privilege

5.25 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I beg to move,

That the matter of alleged improper pressure brought to bear on the Select Committee on Members' Interests in 1994 be referred to the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

The motion was facilitated by Madam Speaker's statement yesterday. I must stress, first, that the issue reflects no personal animosity towards the Paymaster General, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts). Indeed, he and I have rarely spoken except to talk about my old school, Hayling Island county secondary, which is in his constituency.

Secondly, I should like to make it clear that I shall not draw any conclusions about the particular allegations. That is, in my view, the role of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges. It is, however, my intention to bring the allegations to the attention of the House in the hope that the principle of my argument is fully understood and that the House will agree to refer the matter to the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Page 135 of "Erskine May" argues that when a breach of privilege or contempt occurs, the House should exercise its penal jurisdiction sparingly, and

"only when satisfied that to do so was essential in order to provide reasonable protection for the House, its Members or its officers from improper obstruction or attempt at or threat of obstruction causing, or likely to cause, substantial interference with the performance of their respective functions."

The articles in *The Guardian* and other newspapers on 5 and 6 October 1996 suggest that there is a prima facie case and evidence requiring investigation. It may help the House if I remind hon. Members of the specific allegations made on 5 October.

The Guardian claims:

"Enclosed in the letters sent to the party leaders—and to the Speaker of the House of Commons, Betty Boothroyd—are copies of a document obtained by the newspaper as it built up its defence to the libel action mounted by the disgraced former minister and the lobbyist. The pair abandoned their action, paying part of the paper's costs earlier this week. *The Guardian* believes the document shows how the Conservative Party has, through senior party and government members using the mechanisms of Parliament, conspired to prevent a full and public airing of the facts about the behaviour of Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Greer."

The Observer, on 6 October, claims to quote from a memorandum. Again, I will read it exactly. The paper says:

"The memo says: 'Said No. 10 had got in a muddle about Committee on Members' Interests. They claimed it had cleared Neil Hamilton but actually this was only on a complaint about remarks of his, not on the new allegations.

He is now expecting to receive a formal complaint about Hamilton receiving money, etc. He could: (1) argue now sub judice, get committee to set it aside or (2) investigate as quickly as possible, exploiting good Tory majority at present. We were inclined to go for (1) but he wants our advice".

Also on 6 October *The Sunday Times* developed the story saying:

"Last night Johnson Smith, a member of the committee that will now investigate the charges against Hamilton, said he could well have discussed the case with Willetts but denied exploring any attempt to help the former Minister."

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the quiet dignity with which he is making his submission today. In doing so, as he knows, I speak as a member for quite some time of the Privileges Committee of the House. Will he accept, as I am sure he does, that if a buck has to stop, it may not necessarily stop with the particular hon. Member against whom allegations are made?

Junior Whips, Madam Speaker, as you know, are not soloists. Their work is very carefully choreographed.

Madam Speaker: Order. If this is an intervention, it must be pertinent and to the point or a question. It must not be a speech. Will the right hon. Gentleman please come to the point?

Mr. Morris: Their work is choreographed. I am saying that the Patronage Secretary may be involved. Others higher up may be involved. It may be that this has to be a very wide-ranging inquiry, not just about one hon. Member.

Mr. Miller: I respect my right hon. Friend's contribution to the Privileges Committee and other aspects of the House, but I shall not be drawn on other issues of that nature. If the House approves the motion, it will be a matter for the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

I have related to the House the detailed allegations in the press. Hon. Members may well ask whether, if they are all true, it is a matter for the Whips. The point is very simple. There must be a clear distinction between the functions of the Whips in areas of legitimate party management and, separately, in their role when Parliament acts in a quasi-judicial capacity.

The investigation undertaken by the Committee on Members' Interests under the chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) was of a quasi-judicial nature. In Britain, it is accepted that when a body is considering matters in a judicial or quasi-judicial manner, it is fundamentally wrong to exert or seek to exert political or any other form of pressure on it. That would apply equally to a local authority planning committee or an Old Bailey jury.

The same principle applies in Parliament. Therefore, if the allegations are true, they are very serious. It seems to me that the Committee should demand to see all the papers referred to in the newspapers. I would also urge that the inquiry be totally open.

Hon. Members must realise that the public hold us in very low esteem. That is due in part to the so-called sleaze issue. If the alleged interference actually occurred, we cannot hope to restore any of that public confidence in the integrity of the House unless we take firm and decisive action. We have a duty and a responsibility to do that. Now let us ensure that there is the fullest unfettered inquiry into the allegations.

5.34 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I rise simply—and briefly—to express the hope that the House will agree to the motion and remit the complaint to the Standards and Privileges Committee for its consideration and advice. The House will understand, however, that as Chairman of the Committee that would examine the matter if the House were to make that decision, it would not be appropriate for me to make further comment this afternoon.

5.35 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I also shall be brief, not least because I am also a member of the Standards and Privileges Committee and I would not want to prejudge any inquiry. I shall simply say a few words to welcome the opportunity for such a reference.

The Committee has already embarked on an inquiry into allegations that have been made relating to Members' interests. It has done so as a matter of urgency. However, there is still some misunderstanding of the dual role of the Committee. It exists to raise issues concerning Members' interests, but it also deals with any complaints about privilege. Therefore, without reference to a Committee that relates specifically to privilege, and not just to Members' interests, certain aspects of recent allegations would not be subject to investigation. That would be most unsatisfactory. I hope that the House will agree that it would be wrong for the Committee to be restricted in any of its investigations.

On Monday, you, Madam Speaker, said:

"the reputation of the House as a whole has been called into question."—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1996; Vol. 282, c. 463.]

I agree, and I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House share your strong concern. It is essential, therefore, that all the matters should be investigated as quickly as possible. However, it is also vital that the investigations are thorough and complete. I know that my colleagues on the Committee are as keenly aware as I am of their responsibilities in the matter.

I hope that those who may be called to give evidence or to provide documentation will also be aware of their overriding responsibilities to the House and that everything that the Committee needs by way of evidence or documentation will be forthcoming. Unless that is the case, the matters will not be resolved. I trust, therefore, that everyone will co-operate fully with the inquiry of the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

5.37 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): The House wishes to reach a rapid conclusion on the matter and I am sure that that is right, but as we are considering the reputation of Parliament, I want to put two separate points to the House. First, was the reputation of Parliament damaged by what some of its Members did? I am not concerned with that. Secondly, has the reputation of the House been damaged by the way in which the House has handled the matter? In my view, that is the real problem that the House has absolutely failed to confront.

The matter arose more than two years ago. At the time, I was on the Privileges Committee—the Committee on which I was proudest to serve. As the House may recall, I was not prepared to sit on a secret Committee and I was duly removed on a motion of the Leader of the House. I am very glad that I was not on a Committee that was bound to secrecy because many of the problems have arisen because of that secrecy.

Why does the House not rapidly legislate to deal with the standards required of Members of Parliament? If I offered somebody £1,000 to vote for me in an election, I would be guilty of a corrupt practice. I would be taken before an election court. That court would report to the Speaker and the House would endorse the decision of the court because we have the final say. When we are elected Members of Parliament, why are we not governed by legislation? If somebody offered me £1,000 to table a question—nobody ever has—should that not be subject to legislation on the representation of the people by an extension of the law?

We should be discussing the rights of the electors, not the reputation of Parliament as if somehow we were preserving an old monument. When people elect a Member of Parliament, they should know that Members of Parliament can be relied upon to defend their constituents and present their own opinions honestly to the House. If people think that, when an hon. Member is elected, he has a marketable product at his disposal—his influence—we will enter an area that has been dealt with in the past in respect of corrupt elections.

When elections were contested in the old days—I am talking about the 19th century—the House used to deal with the matter in Committees like the Privileges Committee. The result was that the Government majority on the Committee always upheld their own candidates, so the House decided to transfer the responsibility to an election court.

I had a funny experience when I was once taken to an election court and disqualified by it—not for a criminal offence, but for the fact that there had been a biological change in my blood supply, which two judges contended disqualified me from sitting in the House of Commons, where I had been a Member for 10 years. There was not a jury, just two judges. The election court heard the evidence for two weeks and reached the marvellous conclusion that removed me from this House. That is how the matters before us should be dealt with. Parliament has abandoned the responsibility to make clear in law which rules govern it.

A code of practice and so on in the House is perfectly proper, but gets us into another difficulty. Whatever hon. Members may or may not have done—I am not a muck-raker and never have been—it is not at all certain that it was illegal. Perhaps some of the practices, which we would all regard as very undesirable, are perfectly legal. Why are they legal? That is the problem that the House has dodged.

There should of course also be full disclosure. When people vote for a parliamentary candidate, the candidate's interests should be on the polling card issued by electoral registration officers so that people know exactly what they are. Disclosure is a safeguard.

My final point also arises from my own unhappy experiences. I do not believe that the House has the right to remove elected Members of Parliament because it does not like what they have done, even if it is not illegal. The House has no right to remove its own Members. They can be removed only by law. The law has to be clear. If a Government contractor is disqualified, which he can be under the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975, why should other people who are engaged in the business of promoting some private interest for money not also be disqualified?

It is not in doubt that the matter will go before the Standards and Privileges Committee, but how long it will take to deal with it I do not know. It is always possible that the Government might not survive the Queen's Speech, in which case it is possible that the business of this Committee, like that of many other Committees, will drift into another Parliament when it is long forgotten.

[Mr. Tony Benn]

I am not absolutely sure that the election will be after the Committee has reported. If the report is likely to be published before the election, I can imagine other Whips asking whether they really want it all to come out on the eve of polling day, and a similar type of influence may be brought to bear.

One objection is that the time scale is wrong. It is two and a half years since the matters came into the public domain and the House has absolutely failed to deal with them in the way it should: a quick and open examination of the evidence and an immediate move to legislation so that electors know the law relating to their Members of Parliament just as they know that which relates to their candidates.

I ask the House to consider that suggestion, not because I am trying in any way to stir argument about the merits of the motion, which my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) moved with proper parliamentary dignity, but to draw attention to the fact that the issue should not be one that sells newspapers due to access to leaks. The matter should not be used for that or party political advantage because who knows what would come up if there were a proper examination. It should be used to ensure that the people who send us here know that we are governed by law and that they can be as near as certain that if breaches occur they will be dealt with by the courts and not Committees that inevitably, by necessity, have a Government majority.

5.43 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): My right hon. and hon. Friends and I warmly welcome both your statements, Madam Speaker, of Monday and Tuesday and the motion tabled by the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), which we support without reservation. We also clearly welcome the fact that the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House want expeditiously to refer the matter to the Committee. That is a welcome start. I subscribe entirely to the views expressed by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) about declaration of interests for those standing for elections and about legislation. I share the hope of that outcome.

I should like to make four points about procedure. First, I agree with the point made by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris)—it is clear that it would be entirely inappropriate to investigate the activity of an individual or two without looking at those who may be connected to them. Out of fairness to all hon. Members, the Committee must consider all those who, by implication, as well as other ways, are associated with the allegations.

Secondly, it would be extremely unsatisfactory if this matter remained in Committee and was not reported to the Floor of the House before the end of this Parliament. Although it is obviously not entirely within the Government's control, the election could be as late as May next year. I hope that the Leader of the House, as the Committee Chairman, and Committee members will try to ensure that the Committee does its job as quickly as is compatible with its important task. Speed is important because justice and truth delayed is justice and truth denied to the public at the next election.

Thirdly, Sir Gordon Downey will produce his own report. We understand that he has been working hard already. That report must enter the public domain. It is important that advice from the Officer of the House charged with investigative and other responsibilities is a public document. If we are to restore public confidence in our procedures, as your statement, Madam Speaker, sought to establish that we would, that document must be published.

Fourthly, and perhaps most important, I hope that the Leader of the House will make it clear—obviously not now at the Dispatch Box, but by another method later tonight—that the vote in Committee will be free of party line. I also hope that, when the matter comes back before the House, there will be a free vote with no party line. It would be entirely unacceptable if any report and any subsequent motions that came before the House were accompanied by any party political attempt to determine the result of a vote. Indeed, it would be incompatible with the request that the Committee investigate.

The sooner the Leader of the House can make it clear to the public that that is what will happen, the sooner the Committee will command the necessary public confidence to assist the restoration of the House's reputation. It is vital that the matter is not dealt with in a party political way and that all hon. Members are free to speak and vote independently of the party to which they belong.

5.47 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I wish that I could get excited about the idea that the House of Commons, with all its mumbo jumbo, by sending the matter to a Committee of the House of Commons, will resolve it and satisfy the public. The truth is that the public know that self-regulation is wrong.

I have stood up in the House with many of my hon. Friends countless times to say that it is wrong for the police to investigate their own complaints and that investigation should be done by some outside body. We say it about the Stock Exchange, Lloyd's, and even about hospital trusts, which now investigate the complaints that we send in. Previously, another health service body used to investigate them. Somehow or other, for this place, it is right for a Committee to deal with such matters.

I read the other week that our Labour Front-Bench team—new Labour or whatever it is—were on the point of calling for a judicial inquiry. I thought that that was a smart move. Somehow or other they backed off. They should have stuck to their original proposition. There has been a litany of Select Committees. Although on some Committees hon. Members beaver away out of the glare of publicity about some matter before them—I recognise that much work goes into them—I do not approve of Select Committees. I am not on any; I do not believe in them. I do not believe in the system of sloppy consensus and the all-party embrace.

On this issue, the public are watching. They do not know about what takes place on many other Select Committees, but they know about this one. They think that the House of Commons should do better, and that the matter should be dealt with by somebody outside. There should be a judicial inquiry.

Just imagine what the story is about. It is about a Tory Whip being told, presumably by one of the higher-ups in the Government, to finger a Committee—to ensure that it

uses its Tory majority to get the right result. I was not surprised when I read about that in *The Guardian*. What surprised me was the fact that the Whip—

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Put it on paper.

Mr. Skinner: Yes, the fact that he put it on paper. Then, because the Whip put it all on paper and handled the matter sensitively, he was promoted. That was what surprised me.

Cynic though I may be, I must point out that when the Committee is set up again, it will be another Tory-dominated Committee. The Tory Government have a majority of one, so they tell me, and the two people principally involved in the allegations are the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) and the Paymaster General, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts). Can the House imagine in its wildest dreams—I cannot—that the Tory Government who are hanging on for a May general election will throw away their majority by coming to any conclusion other than to save the skins of two of their Members of Parliament? I do not believe that they will do anything else.

Almost every Select Committee that has operated in the glare of publicity has backed the Government. I have watched them all. There was the Committee that investigated the coal industry, and many more. At the end of the day, when the chips are down, we always find that the Tory Government's majority holds sway.

That is why I am not convinced that the road that we are now travelling will resolve the matter. One of my colleagues told me earlier, "Dennis, ask them to make sure that all the papers—not just some, not just those that went to court—are submitted to the inquiry. What is more, would it not be a good idea if all the papers were put in the Library, so that those of us who are not on the Committee can read them?" What about that? Let us have some transparency. That is the new word that everybody keeps trotting out in this place.

The whole story has been a litany of failure. In 1976 we managed to set up a Register of Members' Interests. Some people said, "Stuff it. I'm not putting my name in there." Then the Nolan committee was set up, with some Members of Parliament and a few members of the chattering classes. It was the first time for many years that people had been brought in from the outside. That committee made a marginal proposition to improve the so-called register.

What happened? The Government ran away from some of the proposals, and when the new rules were introduced and it was declared that everybody must declare their income from moonlighting, about 30 Tory Members of Parliament said, "We're not putting our income in."

So the public outside say, "Oh yes? They are going to send the investigation to another Committee of the great and good in the House of Commons. What will happen to it there?" Most of them will draw the same conclusion as I do about where we will be when it is all done. That will probably be after the general election, because the Government will find ways of dragging it out. They will use Whips and every other means to ensure that the process goes on until after the election.

The net result will be that the Government will think that they have swept the whole thing under the carpet, but then something else will happen and people in the press and the other media will say that Parliament has been brought into disrepute. Then the Government will try again to cobble some other form of mumbo jumbo to look after the business in the House.

It ain't good enough. It is time to say that if we want to deal with the matter, it should be done by a judicial inquiry. Then, every Member of Parliament and every member of the public will have the chance to know what is taking place, and to see that the people who run Parliament—and, indeed, every Member of Parliament—are held to account, not by a small Committee in this little greenhouse, this palace of varieties, but by the people outside.

5.53 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on what he has done today. However, I would hesitate to approve a motion that did not make it perfectly clear that the Committee would sit in public.

We have been through the argument before, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) made the same point when he was excluded from the Privileges Committee. There is nothing in the motion, and no commitment from the Leader of the House, who will chair the Committee, to say that the proceedings will be held in public.

If the Committee does not sit in public, there will not be public confidence. There can be no public confidence if such matters are dealt with as they were by the former Privileges Committee. I hope that that point will be well taken by the Leader of the House and by those who will sit on the Committee.

Until recently, the view expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), that self-regulation was not appropriate, would not have been accepted by most people. Most, including me, would have said that we should regulate our own affairs—indeed, that we had a duty and responsibility to do so. That is a long tradition, and I would have said to my hon. Friend that I disagreed with him about it. I continue to disagree with him, but to a far lesser extent.

The situation is grave. I do not want to exaggerate it or give the impression that people have lost confidence in Members of Parliament altogether and no longer come to our surgeries or write to us. That would be nonsense. We know that when people have problems they often come to us and hope that we will do our best to resolve them, and I do not want to give a different impression, but people's view of Parliament as a whole should alarm us.

This is a narrow motion, and I do not want to broaden the debate—indeed, you would not allow me to do so, Madam Speaker—but the fact that 67 per cent. of the people consulted in a recent opinion poll published in *The Guardian* believe that we are generally on the make is certainly alarming and disturbing. The effects of the misdeeds, or alleged misdeeds, of one or two hon. Members have spread to the House of Commons as a whole, so we cannot simply dismiss the point of view that the time may come, if it has not come already, when self-regulation is no longer appropriate.

The Nolan committee has already been appointed. Years ago, it would have been unthinkable that such a committee would be set up to consider standards in the

[Mr. David Winnick]

House. The conventional view would have been obvious—that that was our job—but few people disagreed with the decision that was taken, rightly in all the circumstances at that time, to set up the committee.

The important aspect of the matter before us—and of related matters—is that they constitute a test. If the Committee works as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover assumes it will, the time will have come when no confidence in self-regulation will be left. People will argue strongly outside that if other organisations have avoided self-regulation, there is no reason why the House of Commons should cling to the past.

That is the test. How will the Committee go about its business? Will it sit in public, as I have asked? Shall we ensure that the Government majority on the Committee does not act in such a way as to make it clear that the inquiry will not be the impartial inquiry that is essential not only in the context of the matter before us, but for the sake of the reputation of the House?

I have nothing against the Paymaster General, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts)—certainly nothing personal. Some might say that, if we must have Tory Members, we might as well have Tories such as him. I have no desire to see the hon. Gentleman scapegoated. A serious allegation has been made, and he has a perfect right to defend himself. We all agree on that, but his defence should be heard in public before the Committee, and if others are involved, we should know.

I shall certainly not vote against the motion, but I believe that it sets the House a test. If our reputation is to survive and people are to have confidence in Parliament as a whole, it is essential that when this subject, and other far more serious allegations, are investigated—after all, the matter before us is fairly minor compared with the other matter that will be before the Committee—it is seen that the Committee can act impartially, so as to make it clear that we are capable of running and regulating our affairs.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the matter of alleged improper pressure brought to bear on the Select Committee on Members' Interests in 1994 be referred to the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Public Accounts Committee

5.58 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton–under–Lyne): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the 41st to 47th reports of the Committee of Public Accounts of Session 1994–95, of the 1st to 41st Reports of Session 1995–96; and of the Treasury Minutes and Northern Ireland Department of Finance and Personnel Memoranda on these Reports (Cm. 3166, 3167, 3172, 3189, 3222, 3243, 3279, 3298, 3327, 3373, 3379 and 3384) with particular reference to the following Reports of Session 1995–96:

First, Child Support Agency (House of Commons Paper No. 31);

Sixth, A Review of the Financial Controls over Indirectly Funded Operations of the Metropolitan Police Service (House of Commons Paper No. 109);

Tenth, The Annual Report of the European Court of Auditors and the Statement of Assurance (House of Commons Paper No. 250);

Thirtieth, Ministry of Defence: Management of Works of Art (House of Commons Paper No. 337);

Thirty-eighth, Lord Chancellor's Department and the Court Service: Handling Small Claims in the County Courts (House of Commons Paper No. 410); and

Forty-first, Evaluating the Applications to run the National Lottery and the Director General's Travel and Hospitality Arrangements (House of Commons Paper No. 96).

We are looking today at the hard work of the Committee during the past year, in which 48 reports have been produced—seven in the 1994-95 Session and 41 in the 1995-96 Session. I welcome the presence in the Chamber of the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, whose predecessor was very helpful in wholeheartedly accepting our eighth report of 1994. That was a most important report, and his acceptance of it was of great value to us in our subsequent work.

I pay tribute to the outstanding Comptroller and Auditor General, Sir John Bourn, and his highly qualified and dedicated staff, who have been most valuable to the Committee and to the House. Sir John is, of course, now an Officer of the House, as is John Dowdall, the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland.

The current staff are different from what they were. It used to be that people came in at the age of 18 to learn bookkeeping, and they learned not much more than that. Now, we have auditors and professionally qualified accountants, who are in great demand in the City of London and accounting firms. They now have a level of professionalism that we never saw before—certainly not up until the early 1980s.

I welcome the help given by the Clerk of the Committee, Mr. Ken Brown, who has been most valuable in producing all our papers. These seem to grow in complexity all the time, but his explanations are welcome. I also thank the members of the Committee, who are outstanding. I am grateful to my colleagues, who do enormous amounts of work—far more than when I was first appointed to the Committee in 1965.

At that time, there was a very small amount of work in comparison with what we have now, with just one report a year covering all the various elements. Now we have a multitude of reports, and the work imposed on my colleagues is very great. They bring a great deal of

enthusiasm, perseverance and dedication to it. I am also grateful to the Treasury's officer of accounts and to the accounting officers for their work.

During the past 13 years, the Committee has introduced a custom of inviting some accounting officers who are reaching retirement age to give their thoughts on the work of the Committee and the direction that it might take. Those comments have been welcomed. As this will be the last Public Accounts Committee debate of this Parliament, the present Committee should set out some matters that a future Committee may wish to consider.

First, success must hinge on the belief that nothing—certainly not party considerations—should come before the interests of the taxpayer. In the past 13 years, the Committee has produced more than 500 reports—all of which have been unanimous. That unanimity is not a result of fudged conclusions or recommendations, but because the people we are defending are at the forefront of our minds.

We know that we have the obvious advantage of not examining policy, as the Committee is as divided on such matters as any other in the House. But we take policy as given—even when we as individuals may thoroughly disagree with it. The report in which we examined the consequences of privatisation was an example of extreme disagreement on policy, but we examined whether the Government's goals were being realised, whether the assets had been sold for the best price, whether the timing was suitable for the sale, and whether, if there was a case for a clawback provision, it should be inserted. We studied whether the advisers and consultants were wisely and competitively chosen, and whether their rewards were commensurate with the work that they undertook.

We need a unanimous report, so that the Government are faced with conclusions that they cannot ignore by selecting those recommendations supported by one part of the Committee or another. As a result of our unanimity, the Government typically accept the overwhelming majority of our recommendations. When they do accept a recommendation, we do not leave it at that, but monitor the situation closely to ensure that it is implemented. If it is not implemented, we can return to it, as we have done several times. The advantage of meeting twice weekly is that we can come back again and again to matters.

We draw the attention of the House to the failure to implement the Government's own decisions. Such examples include the failure to institute adequate fire precautions covering Government property. Had the Government heeded our warnings, we would not have had the second fire at Donnington, where the Ministry of Defence lost £170 million of Government supplies, nor would we have had the fire at Windsor castle. The Committee has returned to each of these matters to underline the failure to implement previous recommendations.

In those cases where some of our conclusions are not acceptable to the Government, we still keep a close watch on the progress of the issue, and we frequently return to the matter and take further evidence. The evasion of vehicle excise duty in our 36th report this year is one example of this. Following our criticisms, I note that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency is undertaking a programme of increasingly demanding targets. I shall be surprised if a future Public Accounts Committee does not return to that matter before very long.

There is a concentration on big issues such as defence procurement, which costs us £8 billion a year, and these must be a prominent part of our activities. In addition, we must examine a number of relatively small amounts of expenditure where the principles of good housekeeping, efficiency and—above all—probity need to be examined. I shall be dealing with these matters later. Taking account of those considerations, I must express my gratitude for the work undertaken by Committee members. The original work done by members is most important these days. Members have discovered matters that I, the Government and even the National Audit Office did not know about.

We need a close relationship between the Committee and the Comptroller and Auditor General. I know that we take that for granted, but we should not, because we have seen a number of examples in other countries where such a relationship does not exist. It must be based on mutual respect, trust and confidence. We are not in each other's pockets, but we understand the work that the National Audit Office does and the way in which these matters are dealt with. We should acknowledge the advantages we have, and make use of them accordingly.

I now come to the priorities for our work. First, I wish to mention our famous eighth report of 1994 on the proper standard of public conduct. This was a seminal report, which ranks alongside the most important reports ever published by the Committee. The evidence set out the kind of standards we need and how to uphold them, and it was brought to the attention of the House and the Nolan committee. It is crucial that we retain the standards of public conduct that we have had the good fortune to inherit.

Gladstone set up the Public Accounts Committee with the immense authority of an outstanding Chancellor of the Exchequer; that, along with his later premiership, set the standard for the way in which the public services have developed. It was he who decided that the Committee Chairman should come from the Opposition, and it would be hard to find any subsequent period when such a decision might have been made. Yet that decision ensured that Gladstonian standards became those of our public life.

In our own time, we have—through the National Audit Office Act 1983—the greater powers of the NAO and the Public Accounts Committee, as well as the selection of the Comptroller and Auditor General by the Chairman with the agreement of the Prime Minister. It is a great tribute to the work of the NAO and the Committee that, when the Comptroller and Auditor General, Sir John Bourn, was invited to become principal of the London School of Economics, he was able to say that the work of the Comptroller and Auditor General was even more important. That was an enormous tribute to our work.

Of the 185 or so countries in the United Nations, even with the decline that we note in our report, few come up to the standards of public life that we take for granted. We have received a valuable inheritance, and the Public Accounts Committee must pass it on. The eighth report left its mark on all the subsequent work of the Committee, and its impact has been far-reaching.

In the month following the publication of the report, the Treasury wrote to all Departments to draw their attention to it. They and other bodies for which they were responsible were required to review their procedures in

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the light of the report. A new memorandum for accounting officers reflected the issues of propriety and accountability. Detailed guidance for non-departmental bodies was issued, dealing with accountability and the declaration of financial interest. I am grateful to the Treasury for doing so, and for ensuring that the lessons we pointed out in our eighth report were spread as widely as possible.

The Civil Service College provided a course for newly appointed chief executives of agencies and non-departmental bodies as well as their boards. That course deals with aspects of public business and the maintenance of high ethical standards. I have here a summary of 10 Departments that have taken action based on the eighth report and the work of the Comptroller and Auditor General, who was invited to become the head of the London School of Economics, with one of the highest salaries in academic life. The fact that he is still there and undertaking that work on behalf of standards in public life is enormously important to us.

The sixth report illustrated the need to establish proper controls to prevent fraud. The report is entitled, "A Review of the Financial Controls over Indirectly Funded Operations of the Metropolitan Police Service". As the House will know, we have selected six reports to show some of the elements that we regard as important in the work of the Committee. Two others also deal with fraud.

The sixth report deals with a Mr. Williams, who lived the life of a lord in Scotland. He bought houses and hotels saying that he had acquired large sums of money from relatives in Norway. His fraud came to light only through an assessment of his work.

The Metropolitan police service is responsible for policing Greater London, and employs 28,000 police officers and 15,000 civilians, with a gross budget of £1.9 billion. The service has developed a number of confidential and indirectly funded operations to deal with serious crime—organised crime, drug importation, trafficking, terrorism and armed offences. Obviously, those are sensitive areas, which require a considerable element of secrecy.

In July 1994, a theft of more than £5 million allocated to one indirectly funded operation was investigated. Anthony Williams, a senior civilian member of the service, was arrested and charged with 19 counts of theft, found guilty and sentenced to seven and a half years' imprisonment. A further 535 offences were taken into consideration.

We felt it astonishing that a senior civil servant could have been living such a life in Scotland—buying hotels and becoming an important figure in his local town—but coming to London to ensure that the sums of money were available. After his arrest, it was discovered that he had had unsupervised control over a bank account, and was the sole channel of communication between the operational and finance branches.

The operation was financed without detailed supporting evidence from Williams as to the funds needed. There was no independent reconciliation of the records with the claims made. Williams submitted no accounts, and there was no separate account code for his operation. He was responsible for accepting money, deciding how much he wanted, paying a certain amount for the purposes for which it was drawn, and making use of a large part of the balance for his own purposes.

I understand that one needs to be careful in some matters. If secrecy is necessary, one does not want a large number of people to know what is going on. Obviously, the operation involved was of that kind. Nevertheless, if secrecy is necessary, one must be even more careful to ensure that the proper safeguards are introduced. There was a greater responsibility on Mr. Williams' superiors to undertake the proper supervision. If someone has those powers—there may be occasions when they are astonishingly wide—the person's superiors have a greater responsibility for ensuring that other systems are in place.

Mr. Williams got away with that astonishing life. There was no investigation, and I find it strange that no one was aware of his life style. As in all these frauds, the trouble is that the person concerned usually gets too greedy. One starts with a small fraud, but it grows, and one gets over-enthusiastic. Before one knows where one is, one is taking such large sums of money that the fraud comes to light. As to recovery of the money involved, only about £1 million of the £5 million has been recovered.

Our 46th report of 1994-95, "Ministry of Defence: Fraud in Defence Procurement" found that there were 191 cases of procurement fraud, amounting to about £22 million. The Gordon Foxley case was by far the most serious. He dealt in the procurement of ammunition, and was able to secure at least £1.3 million—probably much more—in corrupt payments from overseas contractors. He got money from them rather than awarding contracts to the Royal Ordnance factory, which resulted in the loss of a large number of jobs in this country.

The corrupt payments were aimed at influencing the allocation of contracts for fuses and ammunition. That case was one of the worst that the Committee examined. Again, there was a failure to oversee the work of that procurement officer that I would not have expected, and I hope to see the loophole fully closed.

The third case of fraud I must mention is described in the 23rd report of the present Session, "National Heritage Memorial Fund Account 1994-95: Replacement of the Accounting Officer". A case involving such an officer is rare. The fund gives assistance towards costs incurred with certain items of national heritage.

In June 1995, the Department of National Heritage concluded that the accounting officer of the fund, Miss Nayler, had breached her basic responsibilities. The report states that she had

"allowed a clear conflict of interest to arise by permitting her partner's firm . . . to tender for a contract to be let by the Fund and was allowed to do so despite the knowledge of the Chairman of the Trustees of the conflict.

We note that, despite the issue of a letter from the Department indicating that such conflicts of interest should be avoided, she subsequently permitted the Fund to award her partner's firm further contracts, without competitive tender, which resulted in payments of some £35,000."

Clearly, that was fraud at the highest level. Although Miss Nayler was an accounting officer, an accounting officer of the Department was her superior, which is how the fraud came to light.

The interesting aspect of those three cases of fraud is that they arose before our eighth report of 1994 was produced. The Committee hopes, of course, that such

fraud resulted from the sort of situations that could arise before that report and the action taken by the Treasury and Departments to deal with the serious decline detailed in it.

The Committee's first report of 1995-96 deals with the Child Support Agency, an executive agency which introduced a new system of child maintenance. The year 1993-94 was its first year of operations, and 40 per cent. of assessments on absent parents contained errors—a high rate. One can understand trivial errors, but these were mostly serious ones. I understand the difficulty of getting information from up to four partners—two from the current marriage and two from the previous one. That is a complication.

The Committee seriously criticised the agency and the Department, and said:

"We are gravely disturbed that at least 40 per cent of the child maintenance assessments made on absent parents in 1993-94 contained errors. We severely criticise the Department and the Agency for allowing this state of affairs to arise. While we recognise the difficulty the Agency face in getting accurate information from up to four parties, not all of whom may wish to be cooperative, achieving accuracy in maintenance assessment is essential if the Agency are to provide a fair and efficient service in the interests of children. We therefore urge the Agency to continue their efforts to explain to parents why the law requires the information concerned and to pursue non-compliance tactfully but firmly."

The agency has been set a new target of 75 per cent., rather than 60 per cent., accuracy. We were told by the Department that the planning assumed that the average assessment would take about two and a half hours. In fact, it took twice as long, so it fell hopelessly into arrears. As Sir Michael Partridge, the permanent secretary to the Department, said:

"it is quite unprecedented in anything I have come across in public service."

That is a serious indictment from a distinguished public servant, who understood the Department's work so well.

Finally, the Committee states:

"We consider that the Department should have established at a much earlier stage the financial and management information required by the Agency. We note that the Department are to produce a report of things that went wrong and lessons to be learned. We look to the Department to do so without delay and to ensure that the lessons are applied".

We have had the Treasury minute, but the situation is still not satisfactory. The Department was over-ambitious. In Australia and elsewhere, the past was ignored, and it was decided that the arrangements would apply only to future cases. Not following that example made things more difficult. It was the attempt to achieve fairness—and, I suspect, to get some money into the Treasury—that produced some of the problems.

The 10th report concerns the annual report of the European Court of Auditors and the statement of assurance. We have insisted that the Court of Auditors should be able to assure us that the money is spent properly. Partly as a result of our Committee's efforts—we have been very strong on this—in November 1995 we got the first statement of assurance from the Court of Auditors. It produces an assurance on the legality and regularity of transactions. It gives us information of which we can make some use. We immediately latched on to that. We were the first country in the European Union to say that the matter was important.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) and I went to Brussels, and later we took the whole Committee to Luxembourg. Interestingly, we had by far the biggest representation at Brussels, and we had an impressive delegation to Luxembourg. I remember a Dutch Member of the European Parliament saying that he would speak in English, because English was the language of anti-fraud measures. That was a great boost to us, and an acknowledgment of our reputation for looking after the interests of the taxpayer.

There is now an internal audit every eight years; every three years is being talked about. The situation is not adequate or sufficiently stringent; we want it to be done better. Fraud should be a criminal offence, and the sanctions must be greater than repayment. At present, if fraud is found out, only repayment has to be made. The role of the court is too passive.

We notice that Mr. Tomlinson, a Member of the European Parliament, is doing useful work on the committee considering transit arrangements. The important thing is that fraud is going to be tackled. It hurts people to see their money going to the Community but not receiving the close scrutiny that we give.

We visited the Court of Auditors in Luxembourg in April. It had taken a sample of 563 payments among the then 12 member states and found that in 59 there were substantial errors. It had no opinion on 14 per cent. of cases, but of the rest, 4 per cent. had serious errors. It was unable even to assess 14 per cent. of cases. It is unable to provide an overall assessment. We regard that as serious. The financial systems of the Commission and of the member states are too often unreliable and inadequate.

From examining the money that we pay to Europe, we feel that fraud is indivisible. Some people say that it is only European money, so we can be more relaxed about ensuring that it is correct to the last penny. However, once such treatment begins, it can move across to the treatment of our funds in Britain. All public money must be treated in the same way. We tried to show the European Court of Auditors that lesson. There is a lack of effective sanctions. The court is an institution of the Communities rather than of the Union. The audits could be farmed out and national bodies made subject to supervision. Those suggestions should be followed.

On the auditors' powers, I should mention something about their rights of access. Astonishingly, the National Audit Office has fewer rights of access in Britain than have the European Union auditors. They do not much use their powers, but they have more of them. The National Audit Office has powers to deal with, and rights of access to, Departments, and does the audits of Departments and executive non-departmental bodies because they are laid before Parliament. However, it does not audit other non-departmental public bodies.

The present position here is unsatisfactory. The Executive, rather than Parliament, appoint their own auditors. Where public money is involved, it must be Parliament, not the Executive, that appoints the auditors. Something is fundamentally wrong there.

We need a practical way to provide inspection rights for all public bodies. The Treasury could issue guidance to Departments and other public funding bodies requiring access for the Comptroller and Auditor General as a condition of the grants that they make. The CAG should be offered the right to exercise rights of access reasonably and after consultation with the sponsoring Department, as he does now in respect of education.

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In the past few years, Departments, agencies and executive non-departmental bodies have set up more than 200 publicly owned companies to help them deliver public services. Examples include the Student Loans Company and regional development organisations. Some executive non-departmental public bodies have been set up as companies.

Some of the statutes of those companies require Companies Act auditors, even though the non-departmental public bodies are not companies. Given the Comptroller and Auditor General's role as the auditor of public funds, it should be possible for him to be the auditor of companies wholly or mainly owned by the Government.

The Government have increasingly contracted out departmental functions to private sector firms under the "Competing for Quality" initiative. The private finance initiative has extended private sector involvement to the provision of services. The value of contracts awarded to them or pending amounts to more than £5 billion. The Comptroller and Auditor General has guaranteed rights of access only to papers under the control of auditor departments, not to relevant records in the hands of private firms which carry out contracted-out functions.

The Government's guide to market testing made it clear that the Comptroller and Auditor General should have access to contractors. There is a need to give the CAG access in every case, subject to the constraints that it would apply only to those activities carried out on behalf of the Government and funded by Parliament. It is clearly unsatisfactory that, in its direct responsibility to Parliament, the National Audit Office has fewer rights of access than other bodies or the European Union auditors. I hope that we may be able to see some movement on that, and I should welcome the comments of the Financial Secretary.

The 30th report is entitled "Ministry of Defence: Management of Works of Art". This dealt with a surprising situation. When the Ministry of Defence started to computerise the record of the Government art collection, it discovered that there were 900 works of art, but when it came to examine them, it found that 205 were missing. It did not know where they had got to. Such works of art were often donated by distinguished members of a regiment and displayed in mess halls and elsewhere. It was found that 205, or almost one fifth, were lost, and that many had been lost for more than five years. There has been little progress in recovering them.

The Treasury minute on the report said:

"The Department continues its effort to recover missing works of art but, so far, with limited success."

The problem is that there was no adequate inventory system. The Ministry should know where the works of art are, what they are, and rough valuations. We said:

"We consider the Department clearly negligent to have lost so many works . . . and we are concerned that so many items have been missing for more than five years. We are disappointed that the Department have made so little progress in tracking down the missing items, given that the problem has been recognised for some time. We look to the Department to continue the search for missing items, and to pursue with greater vigour incidents of theft. We find it deplorable that so many thefts have apparently been committed by the Department's own staff.

We recognise that the management of works of art may seem unimportant compared to the billions of pounds that the Ministry of Defence spend each year. But we are concerned about the loss of valuable and historic components of our national artistic heritage, and about the failure of stewardship: the failure to apply principles that people would regard as common sense in their private lives to their responsibilities as public servants. We believe that nobody would be as careless with their own pictures as the Ministry of Defence have been with these publicly owned works of art."

The 38th report is entitled "Lord Chancellor's Department and the Court Service: Handling Small Claims in the County Courts". The small claims procedure in the county courts is one of the great successes of our time, yet it is not trumpeted. I fail to understand why that is so. We found that the small claims procedure was introduced in 1973 to reduce the cost, delay and complexity of pursuing low-value civil cases through the county courts. The limit now stands at £3,000—it has been increased. Individuals use the procedure mainly to recover debts or seek compensation. Businesses use the procedure mainly to recover debts.

The report says:

"We are pleased to see from the National Audit Office survey that most people who had pursued a small claim found the procedure cheap and easy to use. However, we note the evidence that public awareness of the procedure is low."

That is most surprising. Here we have a way for people to obtain their rights readily, easily, and at small cost, yet so few people know about it. We say in the report:

"We consider that more needs to be done to ensure that people considering action know about the small claims procedure. We urge the Department to address these issues as part of their review".

The total cost of the county court system was more than £200 million in 1995-96. The Committee was astonished—we do not use such words often—that the Department did not know the cost of the small claims service. Here we have a success, but we do not know how much it is costing us.

The report goes on to say that the Department must undertake to determine the costs of the small claims courts so that it can set them in context and that it should determine the level at which fees need to be set in order to recover those costs. We said:

"We welcome the Court Service's recent moves to treat small claims as a separate area of county court business and to collect more detailed management information on the cost of the procedure. . . .

We are concerned about the limited information available to claimants on the effectiveness of the various enforcement services. We note that many claimants assume they should use the bailiff service when other enforcement methods might be more helpful."

We urged the Department to provide information, as well as comparative information, on the effectiveness of other methods.

The 41st report was entitled "Evaluating the Applications to run the National Lottery and the Director General's Travel and Hospitality Arrangements". There were eight applications. The director general announced that the successful applicant was Camelot plc. The contract is effective for seven years. The Committee examined two issues: first, the evaluation of applications, and secondly, travel in aircraft and hospitality from GTECH, which is a shareholder in Camelot.

When we examined Mr. Peter Davis, we found that an important part of the evaluation was to establish that applicant companies and all individuals who would be

involved in running the lottery were fit and proper for that role. We were concerned at information which raised doubts about the fitness of GTECH, a shareholder in the Camelot group. This included suggestions of undesirable business practices by GTECH in obtaining lottery contracts in the United States, and alleged corrupt payments in California, Kentucky and New Jersey to various persons, including the state senator.

We heard the director general's evidence that he had had access to all the information, that he had carried out intensive investigations into it, and that his decision to allow GTECH's participation in Camelot took account of a variety of factors, including the fact that neither GTECH as a company nor any of its officers had been charged with an offence, that adverse reports about GTECH were confined to its activities in the United States, and that a former employee of GTECH involved in corruption allegations had no connection with the United Kingdom lottery, the high reputation of the members of the Camelot consortium and GTECH's proposed role in the consortium.

We noted the director general's concern that, if he had required the withdrawal of GTECH, he would have ruled out the applicant offering the best return to the distribution funds. We said:

"We nevertheless stress that it is of overriding importance that the United Kingdom National Lottery should be subject to the highest standards of propriety and integrity and that the regulator should take a strong and active role throughout the period of the Section 5 licence to ensure that propriety is observed."

In relation to scratchcards, we noted that section 6 licences to promote individual games could be issued only in pursuance of an agreement with the section 5 licence holder—Camelot. We further noted that all

"Section 6 licences . . . have been issued to Camelot but that another Section 5 applicant, Rainbow UK Ltd, have alleged that Camelot were not prepared to consider their Section 6 proposals."

We also noted:

"We were reminded by the Director General that he has no duty to promote competition or a level playing field."

We nevertheless believe that Parliament would expect the regulator to ensure that all potential licensees are treated fairly. We therefore stressed the importance of the director general using the powers available to him to take a more active approach to those matters. We look to him to do so in the future.

We went on to note:

"at the time of publication of the Invitation to Apply for a Section 5 licence, the Director General gave a formal undertaking that he would not divulge information from applications without the applicant's consent because he believed this assurance was necessary to encourage high quality applications. We believe, however, that those applying for public sector contracts and licences must recognise that Parliament has a right to information to provide assurance that contracts and licences are properly let without impropriety and that they represent best value for money."

We cannot do our job without that kind of assurance.

As for the travel and hospitality arrangements, we noted that the

"Director General went to the United States in October 1994 to visit selected US Lotteries and that a similar visit was made by two members of his staff early in 1995. Throughout both visits all internal flights were made in G Tech corporate aircraft at G Tech's expense.

We note the Director General's view that his decision to make use of G Tech facilities in this way was based on the fact that to have undertaken the journeys by scheduled airlines would have taken much longer and would have cost the taxpayer more money."

The Committee did not feel that that was sufficient reason to take that kind of hospitality. We agreed with the Secretary of State, who said that she did not think that the director general's acceptance of the flights was wise in the context of his role as regulator of the lottery.

We recognised that the friendship between the wife of the director general and the wife of Mr. Menges has been a long-standing one, but we considered the director general's decision to make use of Mr. Menges's hospitality unwise, as was his decision to use GTECH aircraft for his private visit to the Menges's home. The Committee regards it as of vital importance that the director general should be seen to be impartial at all levels.

When the director general accepts any free flights from GTECH or any other person who has a role as an operator or a shareholder, or has any involvement, he has the

"continuing responsibility to regulate the Lottery and issue further Section 6 licences".

That had not been undertaken at that stage. In our view, the director general's decision to use GTECH corporate aircraft represented serious errors of judgment on his part.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that what is particularly preposterous is that the regulator had previously been told by the Secretary of State and by the Department that he had to be careful about accepting hospitality? He ignored that advice, and went further, by encouraging members of his staff to ignore it. Secondly, it is strange to note that it emerged from the closed session of our Committee that he ignored that advice in the full knowledge of the reputation of GTECH. No one is suggesting that the company had been charged with anything criminal, but the director general was aware that there was dubiety about the reputation of the firm whose hospitality he took.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the director general's decision first to ignore the advice of the Secretary of State, and, secondly, to neglect to recognise the dangers of accepting such hospitality from someone whose reputation was somewhat clouded showed an enormous lack of judgment?

Mr. Sheldon: I was extremely surprised that anyone in public service might even consider for a moment acting in that way. What happened may not have been greatly influenced by that action, but certain procedures must be maintained if we are to be able to show taxpayers that we are looking after their finances as we have always done. It is our job to ensure that those standards are maintained. I hope that our report will help to ensure that.

I look forward to hearing the Financial Secretary's response to some of the matters that I have raised. He has been helpful in the past, and I am sure he will try his best to be helpful on this occasion.

6.44 pm

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I should like to join the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), in paying tribute to the work of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the staff of the National Audit Office and the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland and his staff.

[Sir Michael Shersby]

It is an extremely pleasant experience to be able to stand up in the House and point to a substantial record of success achieved by the National Audit Office. I commend to hon. Members' attention the report of the NAO and some of the highlights from its work during the past year. Because of its work in the past three years, £775 million has been saved, which is £7 for every £1 spent on running the NAO. Some £500 billion of Government expenditure and revenue was audited by the NAO in 1995-96, and 50 value-for-money studies were completed. It presented the first report made to Parliament on European Community accounts, to which the Chairman has already referred. It also won a contract from the European Commission to audit its £2.5 billion of expenditure per annum on agriculture in the United Kingdom. The NAO also holds the chair of the central Government auditing standards advisory panel, and it published the panel's practice note on central Government audit.

That list is a fine tribute to the work of our NAO. Members of the PAC present in the Chamber know how its high standards make it possible for us to do our job and play our part in saving taxpayers money and ensuring that they get value for money.

I was interested in the Chairman's remarks about the small claims court. I commend to my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary what he said about the lack of knowledge of the work of that court and the limits that apply. It would be useful if a note were sent to all hon. Members to remind them of its existence. I hope that steps are also taken to ensure that every citizens advice bureau and other similar organisations are informed about the advantages to citizens that flow from that court, which is able to solve so many comparatively minor but nevertheless important problems that beset our citizens.

As the Chairman told the House, over the past year, we have dealt with a number of major items of public expenditure, such as the substantial problems because of the cost overruns on the Trident programme and our recent work on a report about the huge cost of building the British library. No doubt that work will come before the House in a year or so, when we have produced our final report on that most interesting but rather extraordinary building.

One of the most important reports by the PAC this year is the 10th report on the annual report of the European Court of Auditors. The Chairman has already referred to it. It is extremely important, because for the first time it came with a statement of assurance and a related special report concerning the reliability of the accounts of the Community budget for 1994 and the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions. We have never received such an assurance or report before, and it is extremely useful to our country. As a contributor to the budget and a recipient of funds from it, the United Kingdom has a vital interest in ensuring that the budget is spent with due regard for regularity and value for money and that the majority of the UK's transactions are properly accounted for.

On the court's overall findings, we as a Committee expressed our concern about the fact that there remains considerable potential for improving the way in which the Community's finances are managed in the areas of revenue and expenditure examined by the Court of Auditors in both member states and European institutions. The Committee is pleased that the Commissioners have started a management improvement programme, and I hope that the Government will support the continuing implementation of reforms under that initiative.

The Committee has also welcomed the emphasis placed on combating fraud by the European Council at Essen in 1994. We have acknowledged the steps taken subsequently by the Commission in its anti-fraud programme. We welcome the Government's strong line on fraud, and the fact that they are seeking even closer co-operation between member states, the Commission and the Court of Auditors.

The Chairman of the Committee mentioned a conference that I was fortunate enough to attend with him. It was organised by the European Parliament in Brussels on 23 and 24 April, and its purpose was to discuss action to combat fraud in the Community budget. We discussed the formation of the Commission's anti-fraud unit, known by the acronym UCLAF, which stands for Unité de Coordination de la Lutte Anti-Fraude. UCLAF describes itself as the flying squad of the Commission. It has 125 staff, of whom—we are told—a substantial proportion are experienced investigators; but, strangely enough, it has no legal personality or status. It is simply a co-ordination service.

Some member states would like UCLAF to do more, but it cannot now, because it is restricted by the institutional status of the Commission as a whole, and it has no power to conduct investigations in the territory of the member states. That is because of the understandable national susceptibilities relating to sovereignty. The question whether the United Kingdom and other countries would be willing to allow such a flying squad to cross their national frontiers and follow up investigations there is the crux of the issue of our membership of the European Union.

Other member states have reservations, as we have, about a Community-level body operating in an investigative role within their jurisdiction. They do, however, have a strong interest in the effective fight against fraud. My own view is that Britain would be most unlikely to grant cross-border investigative powers to UCLAF. I share the Committee Chairman's view that our own National Audit Office is the right body to investigate fraud, together with the PAC, and I hope that there will be no change in the present arrangements; but I strongly endorse the right hon. Gentleman's observation that the National Audit Office should have at least the same access as the European Court of Auditors in investigating all matters concerning Community finance.

As one of those who visited the European Court of Auditors in Luxembourg in June, I found it helpful to understand the work that the court is doing for the Community. It does not investigate fraud, because that is a matter for UCLAF. What it does is audit the Community accounts, and ensure that financial and management controls are adequate. I pay tribute to the work of the British member of the court, Mr. John Wiggins, and his staff for all that they do on our behalf.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Will my hon. Friend tell us a bit more about what the European Parliament is doing to tackle all this? Does he think that it, and its

budgetary control committee, takes these important issues of financial regularity and value for money as seriously as the PAC? Could not the European Parliament get hold of the Court of Auditors' reports, and summon the Commissioners responsible for different areas of spending? Could it not increase the accountability of the Commission? It seems to me that there is so much work to be done that it is for the European Parliament, rather than the House of Commons, to tackle that work.

Sir Michael Shersby: I am grateful for that intervention. The European Parliament has a very important role. It is vital for it to ensure that a European Community institution such as the Court of Auditors is doing its job properly—that it is providing the European Parliament with information, and that that Parliament in turn is providing member states with information about the success or otherwise of its work. I hope that that will happen.

As I said, that was the first occasion on which I had the opportunity to visit the European Court of Auditors. Like other members of the PAC, I had been somewhat in the dark about what the court actually did, and I felt that the two days there were very well spent. I believe that it was the first visit that the PAC had made to the court for some 13 years. We have a problem; as time rolls on and Parliaments come and go, it will be unfortunate if we do not understand what the court is doing. I hope that contact with it will be more frequent in future.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I, too, was privileged to participate in the Committee's visit to the Court of Auditors. I share my hon. Friend's feeling about the importance of its work. May I jog his memory in regard to the point raised by our hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith)? As I recollect, the court told us that only a small handful of Members of the European Parliament took an interest in the court's work. I was struck by that: it is a shocking fact, and the House should send a message to Members of the European Parliament that that is one of the most important pieces of work that they should be turning their hands to.

Sir Michael Shersby: I agree. In passing, let me make my annual observation that it would have been very nice if the House had been a little fuller this evening to hear a debate about the work of the Public Accounts Committee, which also has a vital role in ensuring that we are given value for money and economy, effectiveness and efficiency in the services provided by Departments of our own Government. But perhaps Members of all Parliaments find it easier to devote their energies to other things when matters such as this arise. At least some of us, who are present, care very much about such issues, and they may make up for that.

Let me now refer to a matter that interests me greatly, although it is not included in one of the reports to which we have drawn particular attention in the motion. I refer to the 25th report of the Session 1995-96, which deals with civil legal aid means testing. I want to discuss it because of the substantial increase in expenditure on legal aid, and the way in which that expenditure is being monitored and approved. We should remind ourselves that the civil legal aid scheme is there to enable people of small or moderate means to pursue or defend a civil case, and that to qualify for legal aid, an applicant must pass a means test that examines his or her financial circumstances and the merits of the case, to ascertain whether there are reasonable grounds for taking or defending court action.

Unlike many funds that Members of Parliament must examine from time to time, the legal aid fund is not cash-limited; it is demand led. I raise the matter because the cost of the civil legal aid scheme increased from £255 million in 1990-91 to £601 million in 1994-95. The Lord Chancellor's Department told the Committee that it considered the increase to be due to the demand-led nature of the scheme, and to the fact that the legal cases for which assistance was given were now more complex, with more disputes relating to personal injuries.

As a Committee, we were worried about the verification of means, which is vital in determining whether a person is entitled to legal aid. We took the view that

"The Assessment Office should continue with its programme of seeking full verification of applicants' means in representative samples of cases, and that a stronger line will need to be taken with those applicants who do not co-operate".

We noted during our discussion of the matter that the Department is receiving

"an increasing number of allegations from third parties to the effect that applicants for legal aid have mis-stated their circumstances."

We therefore take the view that

"The Assessment Office will need to ensure that its investigation teams have sufficient resources to ensure that such allegations from third parties are thoroughly examined".

I am sure that most hon. Members whose constituents visit them at their constituency advice bureau will have heard the observation that someone who has been in receipt of legal aid should not be receiving it. Verifying means is therefore very important.

We found:

"Under the current system, the Assessment Office do not verify every item of income, outgoings or capital declared on the . . . application form . . . Outgoings, such as mortgage payments, council tax or loan repayments are not routinely verified. Verification of capital is usually sought only if the applicant declares more than £2,500, the relevant threshold being £3,000."

Our conclusions, as a Committee, are:

"We endorse the measures . . . being"

taken

"by the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Assessment Office to improve the arrangements for verifying the means of applicants for civil legal aid and to confirm, where appropriate, the income support status of applicants."

We also take the view that

"The Assessment Office should continue with its programme of seeking full verification of applicants' means in representative samples of cases".

It is important that that should happen, because the number of high-risk cases is increasing. We were told by the Department that

"a small but growing number of applicants . . . pose a high risk to the"

whole

"legal aid fund. Typically, their legal and financial affairs are complex, they may possess"

what was described to us as

"'an aura of wealth' not normally associated with"

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applicants

"for legal aid, and the litigation has tended to have a business flavour of some sort or another, such as disputes about business assets and contracts, sometimes with an overseas element, sometimes not."

The Lord Chancellor's Department became aware of that problem in 1994, when, as the House will recall, some well-publicised cases emerged, in which

"people received legal aid who, as it appeared, were not the sort of people for whom the legal aid scheme was intended."

Shortly afterwards, the Lord Chancellor announced that he would take every step necessary to ensure that legal aid was provided only to those for whom it was intended.

I am sure that hon. Members will agree that £601 million is a lot of money. If that money is being spent on legal aid for people who do not qualify for it or who have taken steps to disguise their assets, every possible support should be given to the Lord Chancellor's Department and to the special investigations unit in ensuring that no one receives legal aid who is not entitled to it.

Sometimes, when I hear my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer talking about the need to reduce public expenditure, my mind turns instinctively to reports that we have considered in the Public Accounts Committee, and one of the things to which it turns most often is expenditure on legal aid. I hope that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary will say something about that when he replies.

Our 45th report is on the sale of County hall, a subject that arouses passions among political parties. I shall not get involved in the merits or otherwise of selling County hall, and I hope that other hon. Members will not do so. I simply want to draw attention to our report, with which we took considerable care.

The total proceeds of the sale of County Hall were about £92.3 million, compared with a valuation for the London Residuary Body, assuming planning permission and vacant possession, of between £90 million and £120 million in June 1987. The residuary body told the Committee that

"the advice from its property consultant and marketing agents was that the Shirayama bid of £60 million was a very high offer, and that the £30 million valuation obtained in 1987 would"

possibly have

"been high in 1990."

The eventual sale of the Riverside building, with which we are all familiar,

"to Shirayama for a cash payment of £50 million, plus a deferred payment of £10 million payable over a period up to 2012, was estimated to be worth between £52.5 million and £57.5 million in net"

present-day terms.

One of the interesting things that happened during the saga of the sale of County hall was that the London School of Economics expressed an interest in purchasing it in March 1991. It was even given access to the buildings. The residuary body said that it did not pursue that bid because it was comparatively low, but the LSE's efforts to negotiate for the building continued through the national press.

More than a year later, on 29 June 1992, following an Adjournment debate in the House, the residuary body invited the LSE to submit a bid within 10 days. The residuary body acknowledged that

"in retrospect, asking the LSE to produce a bid in 10 days was possibly too early; but the LSE had been expressing an interest in the building for a very long time. In the Residuary Body's view, the LSE were negotiating through the press, and it needed to get them to put a financial offer on the table . . .

The Residuary Body considered that the publicity surrounding the LSE interest in County Hall was damaging the prospects of the sale to Shirayama."

It is important for the House to recognise that no offer was forthcoming from the LSE at the end of the 10 days, and it was very unlikely that it would ever have been able to make an offer to enable it to buy County hall.

The eventual proceeds of £92.3 million come partly from the sale to Shirayama and partly from the initial sale to County Hall Development Group, which fell through in October 1990. That group forfeited its £20 million deposit and £4.8 million in accrued interest, which formed part of the proceeds of sale of the building.

The subject is difficult and contentious. Whatever one's views, it is fair and reasonable to pay tribute to the work of Sir Godfrey Taylor and that of the London Residuary Body in obtaining a very good price in all the circumstances.

I pay a warm tribute to the Clerk of the Committee, Mr. Ken Brown, and his staff in the Committee Office. They provide us with a magnificent service. Their courtesy, helpfulness and enthusiasm make our job all the more interesting and worth while, and we are very fortunate to receive such excellent service.

7.8 pm

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) and the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) on their excellent contributions to this annual debate on the Public Accounts Committee. It is the fourth or fifth time that I have participated in the debate, and this is probably the worst-attended debate that we have had in the four and a half years that I have been in Parliament. I echo the sentiments of the hon. Member for Uxbridge; this very important debate deserves a wider audience.

The PAC has a very important history. It was set up under Standing Order No. 122 in 1862, following the Northcote-Trevelyan report, which condemned nepotism, incompetence and other defects in the civil service. Today, the PAC has three primary functions that stem from that report—to combat fraud and corruption, to ensure that public money is spent on the purposes voted by Parliament and to ensure that we get value for taxpayers' money. Those are all very important aims and the PAC is charged with upholding them on behalf of both the Government and the taxpayer. I have been delighted to be involved in the PAC over the past four and a half years and in the work that its Chairman, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne described.

The benchmark for the work currently done by the PAC stems from the important eighth report of the 1993 Session. We did not take evidence for that report—it was an accumulation of the reports considered by the PAC

during recent years—"The Proper Conduct of Public Business". It is an important report that underlines all the work of the PAC.

I want to concentrate on four reports which deal with combating fraud and corruption. However, it is worth recalling what we said in that eighth report:

"In recent years we have seen and reported on a number of serious failures in administrative and financial systems and controls within departments and other public bodies, which have led to money being wasted or otherwise improperly spent. These failings represent a departure from the standards of public conduct which have mainly been established during the past 140 years."

Over the past 140 years, we have built up a civil service that, by and large, is impartial, trustworthy and competent. It is the primary concern of the PAC to ensure that those standards are maintained.

There are 48 outstanding reports before the House—seven from the 1994-95 Session and 41 from the current Session. That demonstrates the work load of the PAC. I actually enjoy the work. I am not suggesting that we take on any more; the balance is about right. We get a proper response from the Government to the reports that we publish. The work of the Committee receives good coverage in the press. All that contributes to the ability of the Committee to ensure that our civil service is impartial, trustworthy and competent.

The first report on which I shall concentrate is the 13th report on the operation of the Student Loans Company. It is the PAC's second report on the role and work of the SLC. The company is wholly owned by Government, with the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and the Secretary of State for Scotland each owning 50 per cent. of the shares. That second report shows that the chief executive of the SLC had been summarily dismissed. When preparing the first report, the Committee took evidence on the setting up of the SLC. At that time, we were concerned because members of the Committee had received an anonymous letter making certain allegations about Mr. Harrison, the chief executive of the SLC. A separate letter was sent to the then Department for Education making further allegations about that individual's conduct. I will not list all the allegations as a number of them were proved to be unfounded, but it is safe to say that there was a question about that individual's relationship with the company that supplied the SLC with information technology—Electronic Data Systems. There was concern about the appointment to the SLC of Mr. Harrison's son, about expense claims, foreign travel and company cars and about membership of the Royal Scottish Automobile Club, to name just a few.

The SLC investigated the allegations, as did the internal auditors of the Department for Education and senior civil servants. The PAC was told by Sir Geoffrey Holland, the then permanent secretary at the DFE:

"No evidence whatsoever has been uncovered to suggest a corrupt relationship between the Chief Executive or any other company staff and ED-SCION."

The chairman of the SLC reached the conclusion that we were

"dealing with a grudge letter which has no foundation in the truth."

He said that

"Mr. Harrison . . . continues to earn the full confidence and support of the board."

It is a bit like the football manager who had the same support at Main road from Manchester City.

In December 1993, a decision was taken to extend the termination date of Mr. Harrison's contract from 1995 to 1998. The value of that three-year extension was £250,000. However, when we took evidence on the operation of the SLC on 13 December 1995, we discovered that Mr. Harrison had been dismissed in March that year. It was a summary dismissal without compensation. The report discloses that a forensic investigation by Coopers and Lybrand confirmed some of the earlier allegations against Mr. Harrison and discovered some new wrongdoings as well. It is that aspect of the report that is very worrying and begs the question why it took an independent investigation by Coopers and Lybrand to provide the necessary evidence on which to sack Mr. Harrison.

In the meantime, students were not getting a good deal from the SLC. Our report records that 1.1 million students telephoned the SLC seeking advice, but only 41,000 calls were answered. The Committee concluded that that represented almost a complete breakdown of the management of the telephone system. That failure to deal with student telephone calls was deplorable. In addition, some 35,000 students suffered delays in the receipt of loan payments averaging six weeks—in consequence, some of them could have been in very great financial difficulties. The PAC was right to draw attention to that aspect of the SLC. However, more importantly, we need to ask why the initial allegations into impropriety at the SLC did not result in a more judicious outcome to the inquiry into why the chief executive had his contract extended.

The next report that I want to deal with is the 46th report of the 1995-96 Session—"Ministry of Defence: Fraud in Defence Procurement". That report identifies 191 cases of alleged fraud between 1985 and 1994. The most significant recent case is that of Gordon Foxley. He was able to secure at least £1.3 million, and probably more, in corrupt payments from overseas contractors aiming to influence the allocation of contracts for fuses and ammunition. He also received substantial bribes. The exact amount is not clear, but the National Audit Office report shows that his English bank account received credits to the tune of £3.5 million between 1982 and 1990. The report rightly concludes that it is one of the worst cases of corruption that has come before the PAC. Some 12 contracts worth £33 million were cited in the criminal charges against Foxley, involving companies in Germany, Italy and Norway. It is interesting to note that there have been no charges, trials or convictions relating to that corruption in any of those countries.

At the time of the hearing in April 1995, I was trying to ascertain how much money had been recovered from the bribes or secret commissions that had been paid to Foxley. I wanted to know how much money had been recovered from the properties that he had purchased with the money that he gained from his illegal activities. At that time, the Government were still trying to gain access to Foxley's Swiss bank account. I hope that that has now been achieved and that some of that taxpayers' money is being returned to the Treasury so that it can be put to better use.

Another worrying aspect of the case is that Foxley's son, Major Andrew Foxley—a serving Army officer—was found in possession of documents that he was passing on to his father. They contained information on commercial matters that would have been beneficial to Gordon Foxley's corrupt activities. Major Andrew Foxley

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was not dismissed from the service. Again, important questions need to be asked about the investigation into that case.

The third report is entitled "A Review of the Financial Controls over Indirectly Funded Operations of the Metropolitan Police Service", which was the sixth report in the 1995-96 Session, and it is an extraordinary but sad tale. Anthony Williams—a civilian worker in the Metropolitan police—managed to steal £5 million. On 19 May 1995, he was found guilty of 19 charges of theft and sent down for seven and a half years.

When we took evidence during the hearing, I asked Sir Paul Condon, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, how many other offences had been taken into consideration when this case was prosecuted. The record shows that I was told that the number was between 40 and 100, which is not a very precise figure. In a written note to the Committee, we had the correct figure of 535 cases taken into consideration. We also learnt that, in a previous instance, £10,000 had been stolen from the police benefit fund.

The thefts were made possible and kept secret because there had been a fundamental breach of Government accounting procedures. Had Government accounting procedures been kept in place at the Metropolitan police, that £5 million fraud would not have happened. Williams was allowed to design the financial regime for funding the on-going indirectly funded operations. He became responsible for accounting for the fund, and he had unsupervised control of the use of that fund. Quite clearly, the temptation was too great.

We know full well that, in accounting procedures, we must separate the people who spend from the people who audit and account for money if we are to ensure that frauds such as that in the Williams case do not occur again. In that case, there was a single bank account, in Williams's name, and he was the only person who received a statement of the account. It was far too easy for him to defraud the Metropolitan police. Because of that massive fraud, committed over a substantial period, Williams was able to develop a double life.

The Williams case provides the Government with a lesson for the nursery voucher scheme. The company that has been charged with determining who is entitled to receive nursery vouchers is the same company that will distribute the vouchers. The operation of the nursery voucher scheme is a clear case in which there must be clear separation of responsibilities to ensure that a similar fraud does not occur. We do not want anyone to be able to do again what Williams did.

Williams bought a hotel, a public house and a restaurant in Scotland. He bought a villa in Spain, and he rented luxury apartments in London. He even bought baronial titles so that he had a suitable status to go with his illegally acquired wealth.

The surprising aspect of the Williams case is that he had a salary of £42,790. It was obvious from his life style that he was living well beyond his means. I should have thought that alarm bells would have rung at the Metropolitan police a little earlier. If they did not ring then—when he arrived at work driving his XJS or his Land Rover Discovery—they should have sounded when someone rang police headquarters in London and asked for Lord Williams. They told the caller that there was no Lord Williams on the payroll, but someone should have started to ask questions.

Another intriguing aspect of the case is that, in 1993-94—I can be no more precise about the date than that—Williams applied to Moray enterprise board for a business loan of £180,000. Moray enterprise board had the nous to ask for references and, when Williams did not provide them, his application was not proceeded with.

To mitigate the loss, the Metropolitan police have tried to sell Williams's assets. Sadly, they have been sold off at less than Williams paid for them, and the net loss to the taxpayer and to the Metropolitan police is approximately £1.2 million.

The next issue about which I am concerned is that contained in the report entitled "Ministry of Defence: Management of Works of Art", which has already been referred to by the Chairman. The use of the words "management of art" in that title is interesting, as we were told that 205 works of art have been stolen, and that 161 are still missing.

Among the works of art that are still missing is a painting entitled "Coastal Scene with Fishing Boat". It was stolen from the MOD's main building in London. When I cross-examined the permanent secretary to the Ministry of Defence about that theft, he told me that the building was one of the most secure in the country—as one would expect—that it is occupied seven days a week, 365 days a year and that he had nothing else to say. I asked whether he thought that it had been an inside job, and he said that he did not think that it had been an outside job.

Another painting that disappeared, entitled "Admiralty House", was painted in 1970 by Alan Dyson. It disappeared from the flat allocated to the Secretary of State for Defence. I shall not point my finger at any of the Defence Secretaries because the permanent secretary to the Ministry of Defence said that, between 1982 and 1991, there had been four Defence Secretaries, and that one of them had not occupied the flat in Admiralty arch. It is, however, a sorry tale.

A further problem in the report on the Ministry's management of works of art is that members of the Public Accounts Select Committee were told that the works of art were of "low value". We asked how the paintings could be valued after they had been stolen. We were told that they had been valued on the basis of the painter and the title of the work. I do not know whether we were being given a low valuation to demonstrate that the losses or thefts were not a serious matter. It is a serious matter, and I hope that there will be an attempt to ensure that the missing 161 paintings and other Government works of art are recovered.

The next report is on the Prison Service and the excess vote expenditure, which is the 17th report of the Committee. This is an extraordinary report. I am sure that the Minister's response to it, in his reply, will be one of severe condemnation of the Prison Service.

In February 1995, the Committee was told that there was a projected underspend in the Prison Service of £36 million. Even by 27 March 1995, the projected underspend was £20 million. When the book was closed, at the end of March 1995, the Prison Service had overspent by £1.6 million. I do not think that anyone would disagree that such a feat takes a great deal of effort and some ingenuity.

We have outlined in the 17th report the fact that there have been very sloppy accounting procedures in the Prison Service and a breach of Treasury guidance. The Treasury was kept in the dark over the situation; revenue was spent on capital; and there were dubious advance payments and unapproved virement. It was a shambolic state of affairs.

I am not sure what happened in the weeks when the Prison Service managed to spend that money, and I am not sure whether there was any central direction of it. Perhaps it is a coincidence that that was the same period immediately before the Prison Service attained agency status. I am convinced that it is not coincidental, and that a message was sent from somewhere to spend, spend and spend. The 17th report—it is very thin, but it contains a huge amount of detail—sets out a shambolic state of affairs that can only be condemned.

The Chairman has mentioned the Committee's report evaluating the application to run the national lottery. When the Public Accounts Committee takes evidence, I often think that senior accounting officers of Departments or next steps agencies are not there to collect the award for the best civil service department or the award for the best well-managed project.

In this case, the report from the National Audit Office on the setting up of the national lottery was very complimentary. The project had been brought in on time and on budget, sales had exceeded expectations, and the money that had been generated for good causes was better than had been anticipated. It was a model report, and the Director General of Oflot could have expected a reasonably comfortable ride from the Committee.

Things went wrong for the director general when he was asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) about his trip to America. My right hon. Friend asked Mr. Davis:

"Did you go to Florida to talk to one of their rivals?"

Mr. Davis said that he had. He was asked whether he had found it rewarding, and Mr. Davis said that he had found it interesting.

My right hon. Friend asked:

"How did you travel there?"

Mr. Davis replied:

"By aeroplane."

My right hon. Friend said:

"Yes, of course by aeroplane. I did not think you swam. Did you travel at your expense, at anyone else's expense?"

Mr. Davis replied:

"I travelled across the Atlantic."

My right hon. Friend said:

"That is the usual way to go."

Mr. Davis went on to say that he had

"travelled across the Atlantic on scheduled airline and that came out of the budget of my department. Some of the internal journeys that I made within the United States were made in the private aircraft of G Tech."

GTECH owns 22.5 per cent. of Camelot and is therefore the organisation that the Director General of Oflot is charged with regulating. It is a matter of great concern that the director general chose to accept that kind of hospitality from one of the owners of Camelot, the company that runs the national lottery.

Mr. Davis then refused to answer any more questions along similar lines unless we went into private session. We did so—the proceedings of the private session are published in the minutes for all to see in the Public Accounts Committee's report—and were concerned about the relationship between GTECH and organised gambling in the United States. There were a number of prominent court cases involving members associated with GTECH.

Mr. Davis said:

"You may be interested to know that the day after I announced the award to Camelot I asked the chairman of Camelot to come to see me. I said to Sir Ron Dearing, who was then the chairman, that I wanted him to be aware that I knew of some serious concerns which had been expressed to me from the United States and that I required him to be aware that I knew and to make absolutely sure that he ran a regime within Camelot which monitored the situation and ensured that nothing untoward happened."

I am astonished that, having awarded the contract to run the national lottery to Camelot, the Director General of Oflot had to take the chairman of Camelot to one side to make that point to him. It was no surprise, however, that the PAC stated:

"In our view the Director General's decisions to use GTech's corporate aircraft represented serious errors of judgment on his part".

Had a member of a local authority done that, I suspect that he would have been surcharged and disqualified from office. I am also sure that had the Director General of Oflot been a time-served civil servant, he would have known that that type of such hospitality should not have been accepted and he would not have made that mistake. My view is that the position of the Director General of Oflot is untenable in light of the PAC's report.

The first of my two final points relates to my constituency and RAF Burtonwood. RAF Burtonwood is a Ministry of Defence property which is now surplus to requirements and being used as a private storage and distribution depot. It is the largest above-ground single-storey depot in Europe, providing 1.6 million sq ft of warehousing. When the PAC took evidence about fire risk, I was interested to note that the things that characterised the problems that we have had at Donington and elsewhere raised questions about automatic fire detection, fire suppression systems, weak buildings and the high value of stores. RAF Burtonwood has all those problems.

RAF Burtonwood is now surrounded by high-quality residential developments. Every time I mention this, I make the point that I live in one of the houses around it. I am not sure whether that counts as a pecuniary interest, but I want it put on record.

I was concerned about the fire precautions at RAF Burtonwood and remain concerned to this day. I fear that a fire there would be a huge environmental disaster and could have serious consequences for my constituents in that area. I still look to the Government to bring to an end the storage and distribution activities at RAF Burtonwood, which have made the lives of some of my constituents a nightmare, and to change the use of the facility to something more acceptable in an area that now has a residential development.

Secondly, I must mention a PAC report from some time ago on the sale of National Bus. Before the sale of National Bus, a £168 million surplus in its pension fund was paid into the Treasury. Mr. Wheeler, a constituent of mine, has pursued this aspect of the privatisation of

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National Bus with some enthusiasm. He finally got the pensions ombudsman, Dr Julian Farrand, to investigate the problem, and the ombudsman found in favour of Mr. Wheeler.

The ombudsman said that he has directed the new trustee to take without delay all practical steps to obtain the return of the money, with interest at an equitable rate, paid from the scheme's fund in breach of trust and received by the Department of Transport on behalf of the company. When the Minister replies, I hope that he will be able to give me up-to-date information on the Government's position on this case and their response to the report. It is clear that £168 million was wrongly removed the National Bus pension scheme, and the scheme's pensioners are entitled to get their money back from the Government.

7.34 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North–East): A tribute has already been paid to the work of the Comptroller and Auditor General, Sir John Bourn, for his excellent reports and for the excellent value for money provided by the National Audit Office. If I understand it correctly, the number of reports has increased, the number of staff has decreased and the NAO has kept within its operational budget. I should like to thank Ken Brown and other members of the Public Accounts Committee's staff for their excellent work in servicing hon. Members. I also thank members of the Committee, especially the Chairman, the right hon. Member for Ashton–under–Lyne (Mr. Sheldon). We are all aware of the amount of work faced by Committee members, but it can be only a fraction of that of the Chairman himself—he cannot have very much spare time during the week, in view of the number of reports produced and the fact that he works closely with the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Last year there were 48 reports, and we are considering 27 tonight. I shall not detain the House by going through them all, but I shall comment briefly on four: the 34th report on sickness, the 36th on vehicle excise duty—they appear in Cm 3384—the first report on the Child Support Agency this Session and the 19th report on fraud in Cm 3379.

I was sorry not to be able to visit the European Court of Auditors with the PAC. I know that the Committee made a worthwhile visit. I had hoped to be able to go, but other Committee work detained me in the House. The Committee was perfectly right to draw attention to the need to work closely with the European Court of Auditors in supervising the huge amounts of money spent from European funds.

I shall deal first with the report on sickness and draw attention to two points that arise from it. I was concerned to find that the Confederation of British Industry's evidence showed that the average number of working days lost in Britain is eight per worker, but in the private sector the CBI estimated it to be seven days a year and 10 days in the public sector. If the Financial Secretary to the Treasury is looking for ways to save money, he might consider why there are three more days' sickness per worker per year in the public sector than in the private sector. I do not know whether he can calculate the cost to the taxpayer, but it must run into hundreds of millions of pounds annually, and it must be worth investigating.

As the Financial Secretary represents a constituency in the north-west, he might be interested in evidence given to the Committee which showed that sickness rates for civil service staff are highest in the north-west. Sickness rates in the north-west are consistently the highest in the country, which I find unacceptable. I have drawn this matter to the attention of the Secretary of State for Health. I received a reply from the Under–Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), in which he confirmed that the north-west does indeed have the highest sickness rates and links it to the area's

"high morbidity rates and mortality rates in general."

He offered no hope that we might solve the problem. I find it wholly unsatisfactory that, year after year, the north-west should have such high sickness rates. It would be more acceptable if it happened only in some years and not others. In attempting to explain why this might be, he makes what I regard as a typical comment from the south-east—that it is

"a reflection of the more general lifestyle and health characteristics of the population"

in the north-west. In other words, because we eat tripe and onions we are not going to be so healthy. I hope that more effort can be put into ascertaining properly why sickness rates in the north-west should be higher. Clearly, the health of people in the area is just as important as that of people elsewhere in the country.

I am concerned about the number of drivers evading excise duty—some 1.3 million vehicles annually. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency estimates that there are some 60,000 unlicensed vehicles in the Greater Manchester area, which accounts for about £8 million of lost revenue. I estimate that there must be about 5,000 unlicensed vehicles on the road in Bolton itself, which emphasises the need to tackle the issue. There is also the question of false addresses being given to the DVLA. It is important that there should be a crackdown on the way in which licences are administered so that not only does everyone have a licence, but everyone gives correct addresses. People who are not interested in giving correct addresses should be made to do so.

I was concerned about other issues in the report. There is the question of whether wheel clamping should be used to impose sanctions against licence evasion. I am in favour of far greater sanctions in this area, but I hope that the Government will consider wheel clamping, because there is no doubt that it has been a racket for taking money off people who are entirely innocent and who have not intended to become the victims of wheel-clamping sanctions after parking accidentally on private land.

I will now move on to the report on the Child Support Agency. The Chairman of our Committee has already drawn attention to the difficulties of getting information from all the different parties; four partners could be involved. The problem of getting information is at the root of the CSA's subsequent difficulties in administering much of its work.

I am not happy with a lot of the work of the Child Support Agency. Just a fortnight ago, I visited the Data Protection Registrar, Elizabeth France, in her office in Wilmslow to discuss with her ways in which the CSA could operate more efficiently. That visit was in connection particularly with a constituent, Mr. Collier, who had been wrongly accused of fathering a child. The father was another Mr. Collier. My constituent was upset

because his employers had been approached by the CSA to divulge his private address so that it could approach him at home. That disturbed his employers and it seems wrong that the relationship between an employee and an employer should be disturbed by the CSA coming in with its great big boots on and making requests for information which stemmed from its desire to find a father who was not owning up to a child. That can prejudice the relationship between the employee and the employer, and it is wrong.

I spoke to the registrar and she said how dissatisfied she was by the way in which the CSA requested information from all sorts of people in areas where it had no right to do so. In the case I was raising, the agency had the right to request information; I was concerned about the way in which it went about doing so. The registrar said that in some cases the agency had been requesting information when it had no right to do so, particularly from partners of absent parents from whom it does not have the right to ask for such information.

There is an important need to look at the way in which the whole operation works. The relationship with the Inland Revenue is the important one. To find out the earnings of self-employed people and others, it is essential that the Government use the information that is available to them so that the CSA and other operations can work efficiently. That brings us on to fraud.

There is no doubt that tax records are one of the most valuable ways in which to seek methods by which fraud can be reduced. If the Government's left hand has information that their right hand needs, subject to the proper safeguards, the two hands should work together to reduce the inefficiencies. I hope that, in that way, it will be possible for the CSA to obtain information about the private addresses of individuals without prejudicing the employer-employee relationship. The Inland Revenue might be able to give a private address from its records, with national insurance numbers and so on, straight away. All that the CSA has to go on is that there is somebody called Mr. Collier living in a certain area who may or not be the father of a child. I feel that the Inland Revenue could help just as easily with that matter as could the employer, without the consequent upsetting of an employee who may be perfectly innocent.

I shall not discuss further matters to do with the CSA, which I find an extremely inefficient operation. The inefficiency raises questions about the need to continue with such an organisation. I shall now move on to fraud and refer to the 19th report and Cm 3379, in which many issues have been raised.

I asked for regional performance figures, and I see that the appendix to the 19th report consists of information supplied by the permanent secretary at the Department of Social Security. It quotes a lot of offices under headings that I do not understand. Under the heading "Scotland and Northern Territory", performance figures are given for offices AD1 to AD6. I do not have the faintest idea where the north-west fits into that. The three areas of the country are "Scotland and Northern Territory", "Wales and Central Territory" and "Southern Territory". I assume that the north-west is somewhere in "Scotland and Northern Territory". If the Financial Secretary is able to establish where the north-west and, for that matter, Bolton and Greater Manchester fit into the six offices AD1 to AD6, I shall be interested to hear that information because it would give some idea of the efficiency of fraud detection in those areas. We know from information that has been released that in Bolton, £4.3 million was saved last year by the anti-fraud team. I hope that work will continue on that front to reduce the amount of fraud in total.

On the operations of the Benefits Agency in Bolton, I draw attention to the concern about the out-of-hours service being reduced. I hope that funding will be sufficient to maintain the service, at least until proper consideration has been given to any options that could be provided if it is to be reduced.

A number of issues are touched on in the Government's response to the 19th report. In paragraph 15, the Department of Social Security says:

"we have commissioned a major survey of disability".

I do not know whether the Financial Secretary can comment on when that major survey might become available and exactly what its terms of reference are. I am not aware of any more information about that other than what is given in the report.

The report comments on the high levels of error and on the appalling performance when the severe disability premium was introduced in 1988. I can confirm from my constituency cases how badly the introduction was handled. One constituent—a disabled person with no other means—was owed £10,000 in arrears of benefit. He became almost suicidal while waiting for the money. By the time I got on to the case, the arrears were substantial. It should not have been possible for them to have reached that level. Paragraph 23 of the Government's response shows that the average level of arrears per head was close on £4,000. I find it incredible that disabled people above all should be left with enormous arrears. Coupled with the general errors, that is totally unacceptable.

The report draws attention to visits to houses as the best way in which to establish the veracity of new claims. I would be pleased if the Financial Secretary could confirm that the number of home visits will be maintained at the levels envisaged and, if anything, increased to improve the efficiency of the detection of fraud. The Financial Secretary may care to tell us whether he thinks that the detection of fraud is better done with centrally administered benefits rather then with those administered at local authority level, such as housing benefit which is mentioned in the report.

I draw the Financial Secretary's attention to a recent report—I do not know whether he has been made aware of it—from Liverpool business school, which was carried out by the unit for the study of white collar crime. The author, a lady called Eve Coles, is a research associate. She has given a lot of information in the report, and I will touch on just one item.

I was pleased to see that Eve Coles had estimated the percentage of total housing benefit saved in councils, categorised under different political control. She established that Conservative councils were better than Labour councils at detecting fraud. The former had a detection rate of 2.2 per cent. of total housing benefit paid whereas Labour-controlled authorities had a detection rate of only 1.44 per cent. However, she was able to point out that Liberal Democrat councils performed the best, with a saving rate of 2.3 per cent.

7.49 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): You will agree, Madam Deputy Speaker, that in general it is an error for an hon. Member to attend a debate in which he has no intention of taking part. You will also confirm that my name was not on your list when you entered the Chamber this evening. However, a few thoughts have come to mind as a result of what I have heard this evening, particularly the points raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) about the erosion of accountability through Government restructuring.

The ultimate democratic responsibility is illustrated by the apocryphal story of President Truman, who had a plaque on his desk saying, "The buck stops here". In the past two months we have seen a variation on that. We are now assured that the Home Secretary has a doormat which says, "The buck stops here", but the mat is outside his door.

There has been a redefining of ministerial accountability. As my colleagues on the Committee will recall from our hearings, the accounting officer should be outside the Minister's door. If the Minister is not accountable, the accounting officer is. When we heard evidence from Mr. Alan Langland, who is an excellent witness and is always very honest and straight, he made a point that was distinctly disturbing. As the accounting officer for the national health service executive, he is responsible for an enormous empire. He made a legitimate but salutary point when he said that he had started to create within his empire the concept of accountable officers. I wonder whether my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne remembers that phrase. Under the new system, Ministers shrug off any responsibility other than policy, accounting officers say, "The buck does not stop at my door either," and there are accountable officers further down the line.

I see in the Box to which we are not allowed to refer our friends from the Treasury who always attend our hearings. I asked the Treasury representative whether he could give us some idea of the number of accountable units. If I remember correctly—I do not have the minutes with me—he told me that it was something in excess of 600. I found that astonishing, as did most of the Committee. We all thought that we had a nice, simple system with Ministers responsible to Parliament and accounting officers directly responsible to Ministers.

The Treasury representatives have now told us that there are approximately—they did not know the precise number—600 such accountable units. It is no wonder that we have the shambles that my right hon. Friend rather gracefully and flatteringly described. He was very kind to the system but would not reveal its worrying aspects.

There was another evolution when Sir Peter Gregson gave evidence to the Committee. During his final appearance before us, which was a matter of considerable relief to him—it was not a matter of sadness that we would no longer be in his work programme—he said that everyone appreciates and values the work of the Public Accounts Committee, but it should not be confrontational.

I remember my first meeting with Sir Peter when the Committee was dealing with the privatisation of the electricity distributors. I almost had to use thumbscrews to extract from him the value of the assets that had been sold off for £6 million. Eventually he told us that they were worth £16 million.

It is nonsensical to pretend that we can have a Public Accounts Committee without any risk of confrontation. Most of the reports that we consider involve questions that are thought to need answers. If we had not been confrontational, we would never have found out about Operation Wizard—the attempt at a covert privatisation bid within the Welsh Development Agency. The National Audit Office was unable to discover it because the costs had been farmed out in different accounts. I promise the Minister that all that is duly recorded as it was before his time.

If we had not been confrontational, we would not have discovered some of the misdemeanours of the Development Board for Rural Wales or wrapped around the neck of Wessex its monumental failure.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne was kind enough to read the relevant section of the report, but there was nothing confrontational in what I said to the regulator of the lottery. Had we not challenged him, we would never have found out about his trips with GTECH. That was not in the National Audit Office report.

Sir Peter also said that we should not be concerned about blame, but there cannot be true monitoring and accountability if, when someone has committed an offence, or one has occurred accidentally, no attempt is made to find out who is responsible or to blame.

In 12 months, we have had a massive rewrite of the concept of parliamentary accountability. Ministers have said, "It's not me, mate, it's him." Accounting officers have said, "It's not me either, it's them," and "they" are spread out so widely in 600 units that most of them know that we could never get around to seeing them all.

Nearly everyone has referred to the lottery. I shall not dwell on the GTECH issue because I made my point in an intervention, but it is salutary to think that during the period when the regulator was swanning around the United States in presidential style in GTECH aircraft, his staff were not doing the work. They had employed outside consultants to advise them on the establishment of criteria against which they could judge whether the terms of the section 5 licence were being complied with.

According to another report from the National Audit Office, 21 such tests were devised, but a year after the lottery had started, of the 21 tests to ensure that the criteria were being observed, only one was operational and it was sloppy, 10 were partially devised but not in operation and another 10 were notional ideas and no work had started on them. That was in October 1995, just over a year after the lottery had started operating.

Each day, Camelot is allowed to draw down the money that it has paid out in prizes. It is astonishing that, for the first 12 months, in which he paid out £700 million, the regulator was simply checking that the amount that was paid out to Camelot was the one that had been requested. He paid out £700 million on the basis that the figures balanced. As the National Audit Office report shows, there was no verification to show that Camelot was entitled to the sum being requested. No one was suggesting that Camelot would deliberately claim money to which it was not entitled, but surely the regulator's job is to ensure that the wrong sums could not be paid out accidentally. Yet a year—14 months to be precise—after the lottery began, he was still operating on the primitive

system of assessing whether there was rectitude in the finances. I am sure that we shall have a chance to look at that during a future sitting of the Committee.

7.59 pm

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): I am delighted to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), although I know that I show up badly in comparison. I served on the Public Accounts Committee with him and others before I finally escaped to the Whips Office. Although it may seem wrong for me to speak in this debate a year after leaving the Committee, I could not do so at a better time.

I should like to place on record my appreciation of the chairmanship, courtesy, integrity and kindness of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton–under–Lyne (Mr. Sheldon). It was wonderful to see him get angry when faced with some of the individuals who attempted to avoid the very pointed questions that open up meetings. It was also an education and a pleasure to work with my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) and the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby), and see the different approaches taken in the Public Accounts Committee.

The PAC dates back to Gladstone; it has a wonderful history. Coming from local government, I find it incredible that the Committee seems to represent the one area of parliamentary scrutiny of expenditure. When one tables written questions asking for the £24 million-worth of spending in a given area to be broken down and receives the reply that it would take too much time and expense to do so, one wonders what scrutiny there is. The PAC has an impossible task of covering all the Departments' public expenditure, and they well know that, if they escape scrutiny one year, another year or perhaps several years will pass before the roulette wheel comes back round to their turn.

One of the themes of the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West was how badly the PAC is treated by the Treasury and, above, all, by Departments. Public scrutiny of public money is essential, and should be applauded. Gladstone should be applauded, as should my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton–under–Lyne, who does a very important job. Almost every report that lands on the table from the National Audit Office demonstrates the need for such work and for more scrutiny.

I should like to refer to the Committee's 19th report, which relates to income support fraud and security in the Department of Social Security. It is not one of the reports highlighted in the bundle, but it deserves examination not only for the amount of money it relates to, but because it shows the Department's history. I am delighted to see the Secretary of State for Social Security about to take his place on the Front Bench. He is very hard when scrutinising benefit. I wish that he would scrutinise it more carefully and exert more pressure on the Benefits Agency, which seems to get away with murder in sheer incompetence. I shall back that up with figures.

The 19th report on the 1994-95 financial year demonstrated errors amounting to £848 million, including £546 million cash overpayments and, even more sadly, £183 million underpayments. As the report says, the errors are in an area of work where they can

"cause real hardship to benefit claimants".

They do not concern people the Secretary of State would chase or say were scroungers or did not require benefit. Of the total errors, £183 million should have gone to such claimants and did not. A written answer from the Benefits Agency demonstrated that, despite the fact that the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office draw such figures to the attention of the Department, it does nothing to follow up the underpayments in an attempt to ensure that the money goes to the individuals concerned.

The Secretary of State is on a crusade at the moment against benefit fraud. Benefit fraud in the income support vote amounts to £1.4 billion—£600 million more than the amount caused by self-inflicted errors by the DSS and the Benefits Agency. Such figures should be enough to cause the matter to be raised on the Floor of the House. Not only the level but the doubtful consistency of the Department in respect of those errors is of concern.

Income support began in 1988. Each and every year, the NAO has qualified accounts in that area because of errors. In 1993, the 33rd report on the Department of Social Security for the financial year 1991-92 stated:

"We regard the reported levels of error in income support as unacceptable. The overpayments are a waste of resources and the underpayments are causing hardship to the most vulnerable members of society."

In that report, the NAO found that just under 17 per cent. of income support cases concerned monetary errors, and suggested that overpayments—this will gladden the Secretary of State's heart, but should raise questions about what has gone one since—amounted to £86.8 million and underpayments to £87 million. That totals almost £170 million.

In the Committee's 10th report two years later, for the financial year 1993-94, the PAC put total errors in income support since 1988 at more than £2 billion. Together with figures in the latest report, the DSS and the Benefits Agency between them have cost the British taxpayer almost £3 billion in that one area of benefit since 1988.

The Committee estimated two years ago that total arrears were £617 million, including £540 million overpayments and £77 million underpayments. There is a steadily worsening trail of error from 1991, through 1993 and up to 1996. The accounts were qualified each time by the NAO, hauled before the PAC and questioned thoroughly, and reports were prepared and sent to the Treasury: yet what was done about it?

I turn to the report in 1993 of the 1991-92 financial year. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West hauls staff over the coals over such matters, he does not do it out of blood lust. We are talking about public money. Anyone can make a mistake, but to continue to do so increasingly over the years at such a level makes one wonder whether it would be a waste of time to bring the Department of Social Security and the Benefits Agency before the PAC again. Clearly the Department does not listen or learn, and pays no attention to the PAC.

In 1993, the Department said, "Aha, yes. It is a very complicated job." Apparently it had

"already spent several hundred million pounds on computerisation and this could rise to £2 billion by the end of the decade."

Now we have the 1994-95 accounts in front of us, and in that year £858 million of taxpayers' money was lost. In 1993, the response to the Public Accounts Committee was to boast that £2 billion was being spent on getting

[Mr. George Mudie]

the computer systems right, which would deal with the problem. Presumably the £2 billion was spent, but the mistakes are increasing. Two years ago the loss was about £600 million; now it is £858 million.

I think that the fellow who drafted the report must have a sense of humour, because he wrote:

"The computerised system had also reduced the number of errors in the calculation of awards but other types of errors had gone up and more than outweighed that improvement."

Several hundred million pounds were spent on a computer that dealt with some mistakes, but which then produced more mistakes, costing more than the mistakes that it had stopped.

Of course, Hacker was at it. The response was, "We shall have a review." The review originally started in 1991—I would like the Minister to note that date. It was intended to deal with the "false statistics" that local DSS offices were apparently sending out. The Department did not really know the level of error, and intended to do something about that. The hon. Member for Uxbridge must remember it well.

Income support accuracy was to be made the Department's "number one priority" in 1993. It was going to have training, new advice and a handbook. So my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne, ever kind, courteous, patient, tolerant and understanding, said, "Go on your way. You will have learnt by your mistakes, you are taking all those steps and we shall not see you again." Ha, ha.

In 1995, the agency was back. By then, it had lost the computer somewhere. When asked about the appalling figures, it had apparently lost the computer, the handbook, the false statistics and—and I have lost my notes, but the point being made was that the work had become more complicated, so there was a need for training.

The ever obliging Treasury had stumped up £9 million for training, with the offer of another £15 million. Has anyone ever heard of such a case of throwing good money after bad? The ever gullible Treasury was offering £24 million to the Benefits Agency, because training was the answer. And in 1995 the agency again pledged that accuracy was its number one priority. Again, the ever understanding Chairman sent its representatives on their way. They may have had a tongue-lashing from the direction of Swansea, Warrington and Uxbridge, but they had escaped for another two years.

The latest report is now before us—or at least, it is not before me now, but I have it somewhere. Whatever we think of him, Hacker has been resurrected. The agency has now forgotten about training, and about the computer, the advice and the handbook. Now the line is, "We shall have a fundamental review." The fellow who wrote "Yes, Minister" could not have written that fiction—but this time it is fact. The review is the excuse that the Benefits Agency and the DSS gave to the serious hard-working members of the Public Accounts Committee—adding that, of course, accuracy would continue to be a high priority.

This time, the response was all about

"tailored training . . . improving the detail and reliability of management information",

but it was followed by the rider:

"However, substantial and sustained improvements in IS accuracy will be achieved only with improvements in the processes and systems".

I thought that we had already spent £2 billion to do all that.

In 1996, we have an even higher level of loss—£858 million. What could the Secretary of State do with £858 million? If those errors had not been made, much of that money would have been available, without any cuts being necessary, to do things that the whole House would want to do.

When I served on the PAC, there were rumours that a training session was being held for those who were to appear before that Committee. People were told, "You realise that you will be there for only three hours. There are about 15 members, and they will all take 10 minutes each. Some are worse than others, and some are more courteous and polite—but just get through that three hours."

That, at least, is training that the DSS and the Benefits Agency seem to have taken to heart. It is certainly working, because they get away with things. Some may think I am joking, but I hope that the Secretary of State will simply pull all the reports together and get a decent member of staff to find out what on earth is happening to his money.

The Department and the agency are thumbing their noses at the Public Accounts Committee and at the public. The loss is £858 million, yet the Treasury offers only four paragraphs in response to the PAC. The first paragraph says—surprise, surprise—

"the level of errors is unacceptable".

It takes the Treasury a paragraph to agree with that.

Then the civil servant who wrote the response obviously realised that he was going dangerously far, because he added:

"As the Committee is aware, Income Support . . . is a complex safety-net benefit . . . inherently complex and thus creates a risk of errors at various points in the process".

There we are. They are off again, asking, "How do you expect us to get it right? Although the errors are unacceptable, the benefit is too complex to get right."

I ask the Financial Secretary to read the next paragraph. I could read it out now, but if I did it would confirm in the public mind the idea that people in the Treasury and the rest of the civil service do not write in English understandable to ordinary people.

The Treasury says:

"Improving accuracy . . . will continue to be a high priority."

For how many years will it be a high priority? What about tailored training, and all those other improvements? There are four paragraphs, and now the Treasury has offered the agency more money.

On Sunday night, I saw a nice programme featuring the Secretary of State and one of the permanent secretaries, who has now moved on to another Department, but who was then rehearsing to appear before the Public Accounts Committee. Representatives of his 166 accountants—obviously the cream, the best he can get—were briefing him for his appearance in front of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne.

With such a record, does the Department deserve to continue to employ those 166 accountants? When do we say enough is enough? The permanent secretary appears

before the Committee and says that the loss is less than 1 per cent. of expenditure. Yet it amounts to £858 million. We cannot afford to throw away money in that way.

Where is that man now? In local government, we were supposed to be the hicks, the backwoods people—low-level, not parliamentary. But if we had a chief officer who delivered that standard of service year in and year out, he would be an ex-chief officer. That fellow is now a permanent secretary in another Department.

As a former member of the PAC, I must speak on behalf of its members, who work hard. They are dedicated Members from all parties. They deserve better treatment by the Government. To achieve improvements in the agency's finances, heads should roll. We should not be content with flowery phrases and allowing people to escape after a brief three hours before the Committee. Heads should roll, because the situation revealed in the report is not good enough.

That may be only one report, but, as the members of the PAC could tell us, it is the tip of the iceberg.

8.18 pm

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): This evening's debate has been informative and interesting. The work of the Public Accounts Committee is extremely detailed, and I recommend that all hon. Members read the reports carefully. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) on his speech, and on the detailed way in which he studied the reports on the Benefits Agency. He gave an eloquent explanation, and picked up on a theme that the House constantly echoes but does not honour—that the role of the PAC is extremely important. However, there is apparently a lack of respect for that work in government, including the Treasury.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East described the Treasury as "gullible", but that is not quite the word that I would use, as I am sure that getting money out of the Treasury is very difficult. I presume that the Benefits Agency is used to operating good stings, and the reports have demonstrated that clearly.

I must comment on the work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), and thank him for clearly describing many of the important points in the key reports. I pay tribute to him and to the members of the Committee. It is clearly a hard-working Committee that does a great deal and pays great attention to its work. I also commend the National Audit Office and the Comptroller and Auditor General, who deal with the problems of trying to pursue public money to ensure that it is accounted for.

The many reports from the PAC—the figure given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne was 500—consider the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. However, perhaps a report on how efficient and effective Departments are in paying attention to the work of the PAC needs to be added. The reports compare input with output, and consider the work of the Government.

The reports are passed unanimously by the Committee. The reason is that the Committee wants to examine the implementation of policy, not to question it. Today's debate has referred to the special relationship between the work of the NAO and the Committee. In his opening remarks, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne talked about the importance of mutual trust, respect and confidence, and stated that they need to be present in the work of the Committee and the NAO.

My right hon. Friend and other members of the Committee referred to the eighth report, on the proper conduct of public business in 1994. While we reflect on the Committee's work in this Session and throughout this Parliament, it is timely to remind ourselves of what that report stated:

> "In recent years we have seen and reported on a number of serious failures in administrative and financial systems and controls within Departments and other public bodies which have led to money being wasted or otherwise improperly spent. Those failings represent a departure from the standards of public conduct which have mainly been established during the last 140 years."

I am not seeking to make a party political point, as it is accepted by the House that that report made an enormous contribution, and that particular paragraph is important in considering the work of the Government. We should all be constantly vigilant in studying that work.

Today's debate focused on how the fragmentation of so much of the Government's structure has led to a lack of accountability in the expenditure of public money. We must reconsider how we ensure that money is not wasted and is accounted for. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne laid out at the beginning of his speech the paramount importance of the interests of the taxpayer. My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) raised the matter of the erosion of accountability, a theme to which I shall return in my brief remarks.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) complimented the NAO on its cost-effectiveness and stated that for every pound spent in running the NAO, there was a return of £7. That underlines the importance of having proper scrutiny of the Treasury, other Departments and all levels of government, local and national, to ensure that we receive value for money. Clearly, that is the case with the NAO.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge returned to a subject that he raised in last year's debate—the legal aid scheme, and the increase in moneys being drawn from the legal aid fund. He questioned whether those amounts were appropriate, and referred to the importance of verifying the means of applicants, which the whole House will endorse. In addition, we must remember that the purpose of the legal aid scheme is to ensure that people are not prevented from gaining access to justice simply because they do not have resources. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman was in no way implying that he wanted to see a reduction in the legal aid scheme, or that it should be cash-limited. He made some interesting comments on the sale of County hall, and I agree with him that we should note the income generated and make no comment on the merits or otherwise of the sale.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) drew attention to the Student Loans Company, and asked pertinently why it took an independent inquiry to reveal impropriety and, in particular, to recommend that the chief executive be removed. He also pointed out that students were not being provided with the services that they needed from the Student Loans Company, and referred to a number of other reports.

The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) made some interesting observations on a number of reports, particularly the 34th report on

[Ms Dawn Primarolo]

working days lost. He asked why more days were lost in the public sector through sickness than the Confederation of British Industry said were lost in the private sector. We should look at the terms and conditions of employment and at pay and stress levels, and they may account for that fact.

The hon. Gentleman also commented on vehicle excise duty, the Child Support Agency and access to information. When Government Departments, such as the Inland Revenue, hold privileged information for specific reasons, we need to be careful about the basis on which it is made available, to whom it is made available and whether there should be wider availability. The freedom of information Act and the Data Protection Acts are relevant.

The understated tone of the Public Accounts Committee reports always interests me. The 30th report, "Ministry of Defence; Management of Works of Art", for instance, states that when the Committee

"asked the Department how thefts could have occurred in their Main building and other secure buildings . . . Their assumption was someone who had legitimate access to the Ministry of Defence buildings had been responsible."

The Department was then pressed as to

"why the Ministry of Defence police had recovered none of the 23 items stolen from the central collection and had made only five recoveries following . . . 30 instances of theft from local collections."

The reply was that

"they were satisfied that the police were doing all they could".

In the second report on "Health Care International (Scotland) Ltd." and the loss of millions of pounds of public money, commenting on the rather ambitious proposals for the hospital, the Committee said:

"We suggested that it would have been better to have started HCI on a small scale and not gone for a 168 bed hospital, a four star hotel, a 175-seat auditorium and an international faculty",

all at the same time.

The Committee went on to ask the Department why Health Care International, which had no experience in the private health care market, had been able to undertake such a high-risk venture. The reply was that

"its Chief Executive had been running a very prestigious hospital in Boston, USA",

but acknowledged that there were some "novel features" in the hospital,

"such as the 'paperless' drug-prescribing system unique in the United Kingdom which the Greater Glasgow Health Board required to be validated."

The Department

"recognised that this was a new concept, the success of which would depend on the quality of the doctors and the links which HCI managed to develop with key people overseas."

When asked why the money had been given, when only three out of 12 advisory board members voted in favour of the project, the Department told the Committee that

"the Board, which meets once a month, is composed largely of businessmen. When they cannot attend meetings, they let the Department know if there is anything they are unhappy about."

None of the six who did not attend said that there was anything wrong with the proposals. The two members who had objected had not done so on areas that were considered relevant. So, absence counted as support for the project.

Finally, the report states that the Committee

"asked the Department whether the location of the hospital was a problem for marketing. They told us that the problem was marketing a hospital in an area where people expect to find one".

The mind boggles about where the hospital was located.

The reports on Ministry of Defence procurement and the Metropolitan police service highlight an absolute failure properly to vet and scrutinise work.

Two reports have not been mentioned. The 33rd report on "HM Customs and Excise Checking Claims for Repayment of VAT" and the 35th report deal with serious questions, which are at the heart of government—whether the taxpayer is being represented effectively and whether services are run on the basis of value for money. That returns us to fragmentation, the changing nature of government and the difficulty in pursuing public money. In a previous debate on the Welsh Development Agency—a report that we considered last year—Mr. Scholar, the permanent secretary at the Welsh Office, said that the Department was too small to carry out effective management of the quangos and that fragmentation and agencies, coinciding with other structural changes, had made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the staff properly to keep account of public money.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West pointed out that with the proliferation of accounting units—there are now 600 or more—the job is becoming more and more difficult. The House needs to consider the gains, losses and economic benefits. The service has been fragmented, which has damaged career prospects for civil servants. Some people may consider that that was necessary because of the difficulties caused by lack of contact with people outside government. None the less, it has undermined civil servants' confidence.

In addition to that restructuring, the Government decided to parachute business men and women into Government Departments. Many did not have a background in the public sector and perhaps did not clearly understand the public sector ethos, conflicts of interest and the need to be transparent. The report on the lottery is an example. Such people were parachuted in over civil servants, further adding to their insecurities about their career prospects.

I am not advocating that we should not draw people from the business world to act in partnership. I question whether that process has gone too far, however, so that we are undermining the heart of government—the planning and the longer-term views that we need to keep public moneys accountable. Another issue was the growth of one-year contracts. That combination has brought short-termism to the heart of government and made it more and more difficult to have a longer-term objective. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East made that clear.

As we finalise the reports for this Session, it is important for us to consider carefully the gains, losses and economic benefits, and the changes that have worked and those that have not, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne said at the beginning of the debate. We should restore the paramount importance of taxpayers' money being used accountably and efficiently and, far more important, ensure that it is transparent who is using it and why.

8.39 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack): This wide-ranging and interesting debate has touched on many subjects that relate to the 48 reports that the Committee has so assiduously produced over the past year. It was beneficial that the remarks of the hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) coincided with the arrival of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. Instead of my having to say that I would draw his attention to the detailed points raised by right hon. and hon. Members, I can say, at least for one Department, that that task has been done without my having to do anything other than turn to the Secretary of State; he heard what the hon. Gentleman said.

The hon. Member for Leeds, East brought a lighter tone to the debate when he drew an analogy between the various reports and "Yes, Minister". I want to paint another picture showing how Government Departments and accounting officers regard the Public Accounts Committee. I have attended it as a Minister, listening to what has been said. Officers take seriously the grilling that they are likely to get, even if it requires them to have some rehearsal. To go before the Committee is a difficult experience. When I was first appointed to this job, I sat in to get a flavour of it. The detailed, forensic way in which information is extracted gives an idea of why people are concerned about their performance and of the seriousness with which they take what happens.

Value for money, efficiency and propriety are serious issues. There was a little adverse comment on how the Treasury operates. However, I noticed some difference of opinion. The hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) said that he was grateful for our comments and that Government Departments had responded properly to the Committee's requests for information. I was grateful for his remarks. So important to us is the remit of trying to improve the service that we give the Public Accounts Committee that we asked its Chairman, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), whether he would grace us with his presence in the Treasury. He kindly spoke to civil servants involved in the work to give us the benefit of his views so that our response could be more tailored to the Committee's needs.

The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne put on record some sage advice. He said that the Committee's first concern was to stamp out fraud and corruption, of which he noted that there were mercifully few cases. He also said that the Committee's remit was not to hand out awards but to identify what had gone wrong and to make recommendations. He confessed that he occasionally pronounced himself satisfied—and, on very rare occasions, very satisfied—with the outcome of inquiries. Everyone who attended found his words useful. I hope that he will grace us with his presence again. That gives me the opportunity to put on record my appreciation, and that of the Treasury and many others, for the dedication and hard work that he puts in as Chairman of the Committee.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) and the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) who, respectively, as vice-chairman of the Committee and one of its longest-serving members, represent all that is best about the Public Accounts Committee and the diligent way in which it undertakes its work.

I shall draw the detailed points that hon. Members have made to the attention of the relevant Secretaries of State. I would be doing them a disservice if I simply read out an annotated piece of paper in answer to some difficult, detailed and very correct probing that perhaps goes beyond some of the responses that have been given in the Treasury minutes and in respect of which more up-to-date information may be available.

One theme comes out of the debate. In any system run by human beings, we must ask how we can improve what we are doing and learn from our mistakes. Wherever human beings are involved, there will be human frailty and error. It is only by continual scrutiny that we can try to improve our systems. It is always easy to point, as we have in each of the commentaries on the reports, to what went wrong and consider how we could have stopped it. It is at that point that the value of debates such as this and of the reports comes through. They show us that—even where people thought at the beginning of a process that a system was in place and capable of dealing with matters such as value for money, accuracy, propriety, correctness or any other description of performance—when the system fails, something has gone wrong.

We are then drawn to the conclusion that it was either the system that was wrong or that the people who were operating it made mistakes or even that there was wrongdoing. However, it is only with hindsight that the problem can be identified and, more important, that we can try to put in place yet better systems and checking mechanisms to ensure that such problems do not recur. But that is a circular argument: because the system is operated by human beings, it is inevitable that human frailty will again play its part.

I acknowledge the excellence of the work of the Public Accounts Committee. Every year we have this debate and review about 50 reports, all of which point to areas where Departments, non-departmental public bodies, agencies and other bodies could do better. It is proper that we have that analysis, but we should recognise the human dimension. I was delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge drew the attention of the House, as others did, to the value-for-money aspects of the National Audit Office's work. Without it and its reports, the Public Accounts Committee would not be able to exercise its detailed role of scrutiny.

Since I have been Financial Secretary, I have come to have great respect for the National Audit Office and have twice visited it to discuss its work in detail. I look forward to further discussions with it on the private finance initiative. The interchange of views, expressions and information between the Committee and Ministers is an important part of developing the role of scrutiny which it undertakes. I am also delighted that it is involved in spreading good practice. One of the best ways to stop problems occurring is for those who have responsibility for the things that I mentioned to know what works elsewhere. I look forward to the introduction of the magazine *Focus*, which will address that issue.

If there is one word that runs like a seamless web through much of what we have been considering, it is "awareness"—awareness of risks, frauds and irregularities and of the need to follow best practice and put effective systems in place. That was touched on in the report on the Ministry of Defence art collection, which the hon. Member for Warrington, South mentioned. Anyone examining that report might well wonder how, if the

[Mr. Michael Jack]

MOD cannot look after the paintings, it will look after the tanks, missiles and other things for which it has responsibility. The report highlighted a slipshod attitude towards the good stewardship of public property.

The report highlighted the situation and a response was given. Again, that shows the sloppiness of a human system being drawn up short by the Committee in its report. There is awareness that the taxpayer has a right to good-quality public services and of the responsibility to improve value for money. That point was brought out by my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge in his commentary on the small claims court. He will be pleased to know that work is in hand to pick up, publicise and exemplify many of the good points about the small claims court and address his central point. An important general point came out about making people aware of what is going on. The small claims report is interesting because it drew the House's attention to an area where light had not shone. People were not aware of what was happening. The Lord Chancellor's Department is working hard to deal with that.

A serious theme that runs through much of what we have heard this evening is fraud. That draws us up short each and every time we hear about it. The Treasury was anxious to make its contribution to deal with that. I opened a conference across the Government that dealt with managing the risk of fraud. We tried to draw together from right across government those who are responsible for audit and accounting to learn what is best practice.

It is interesting to note that people are rather surprised to learn that few frauds are discovered by auditors, either external or internal. More are discovered as a result of information from third parties. The role of the auditor—to return to my opening comment—is to put in systems of deterrence and prevention to minimise risk.

The hon. Member for Leeds, East mentioned social security. In fairness to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, who was here earlier, savings made through action to counter benefit fraud in 1994-95 were more than £700 million and in 1995-96 were £1.2 billion. The hon. Gentleman was right to draw the attention of the House to failings in the income support system, but in fairness and in defence of my right hon. Friend, I should point out that he has had successes in combating fraud. That also typifies the approach of the Inland Revenue.

Propriety in public conduct was touched on in the debate and reference was correctly made to the eighth report. I draw the attention of the House to the fact that, in its response to the 23rd report, the Treasury undertook to prepare new guidance on regularity and propriety. By drawing on reports from the Public Accounts Committee, it aims to make the reader alive to Parliament's exact expectations with regard to financial propriety. The handbook will also feature the checklist which the Committee included in the eighth report, together with the Nolan committee's seven principles of public life. That shows, albeit in a thumbnail sketch, how seriously we take the Committee's recommendations.

The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) touched on the Child Support Agency. That highlights a further theme of much of the work of the Public Accounts Committee, which has been to draw attention to improving public services. If it had not been for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's citizens charter initiative, we would not have given as much attention as we should to that aspect of public life.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge touched on an important external but also internal theme—the European dimension of the Public Accounts Committee's work. Britain should take credit for the work that we have done to support the European Court of Auditors. The court is independent in the Community, but it reports to the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. It is right and proper to take seriously what the Court of Auditors has to say, as our scrutiny Committees do. I was delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge drew attention to the Prime Minister's work in the Essen European Council to examine ways in which the work of the Court of Auditors could be further extended, such as through the system of fines and spot checks on fraud.

It is important that best practice is exemplified and picked up on the basis of what the PAC's reports say, as the reports on Ministry of Defence works of art and fire risk make clear. That point, which was made by the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne, illustrates again the perceptiveness of the Committee and the need for each and every Department to take careful note of it.

Above all, good judgment is required. The comments made in connection with the national lottery illustrate that very point. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage said in response to the Committee's report that an error of judgment had been made. Judgment is much required in all the matters on which we have touched in our debates this evening.

The hon. Member for Warrington, South mentioned a detailed point in connection with the pension of one of his constituents. I shall draw that specific point to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. The Government take careful note of matters to which the pensions ombudsman draws our attention. The hon. Gentleman was right to make that important point.

The right hon. Member for Swansea, West, a long-serving member of the Public Accounts Committee, drew our attention to the number of accounting officers. To make a serious point, in spite of the number of points at which responsibility may be exercised within government and its agencies, the ultimate point of accountability in the hierarchy remains with Ministers and accounting officers. It may be that more people can now be held accountable, but the buck stops with the Government, in the person of Ministers or accounting officers.

This has been an important debate. I always learn by listening to what right hon. and hon. Members say. The 48 reports are clearly noticed. I undertake to the House tonight to draw the attention of the relevant Secretaries of State to the important and detailed observations of those who have contributed to our proceedings.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of the 41st to 47th reports of the Committee of Public Accounts of Session 1994-95, of the 1st to 41st Reports of Session 1995-96; and of the Treasury Minutes and Northern Ireland Department of Finance and Personnel Memoranda on these Reports (Cm. 3166, 3167, 3172, 3189, 3222, 3243, 3279, 3298, 3327, 3373, 3379 and 3384) with particular reference to the following Reports of Session 1995-96:

First, Child Support Agency (House of Commons Paper No. 31);

Sixth, A Review of the Financial Controls over Indirectly Funded Operations of the Metropolitan Police Service (House of Commons Paper No. 109);

Tenth, The Annual Report of the European Court of Auditors and the Statement of Assurance (House of Commons Paper No. 250);

Thirtieth, Ministry of Defence: Management of Works of Art (House of Commons Paper No. 337);

Thirty-eighth, Lord Chancellor's Department and the Court Service: Handling Small Claims in the County Courts (House of Commons Paper No. 410); and

Forty-first, Evaluating the Applications to run the National Lottery and the Director General's Travel and Hospitality Arrangements (House of Commons Paper No. 96).

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

MERGER REGULATION

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 9961/96, relating to the merger regulation; and supports the Government's intention to look closely at the rationale of any proposal for significant further transfer of merger control to the European Commission, but not to rule out the possibility of a limited transfer.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

Question agreed to.

Health Authorities (Deficits)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

8.55 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I regret to have to introduce to the House in this Adjournment debate the subject of health authority deficits. I regret it for a number of reasons, but particularly because deficits should not exist and the debate should not be necessary. However, happily, we have some time in which we can examine the matter thoroughly. It is unusual for a Member who expects to get in perhaps a 15-minute speech to have the opportunity to speak for longer. We never know what may happen in this uncertain parliamentary life. This is the last debate of this Session. What next Session holds, who may know? Constitutionally, any Government could collapse on the Queen's Speech, which we shall have in a week's time, or on any subsequent Division. So this may be, as people sometimes think, the last opportunity. It certainly may be mine, for reasons that everyone knows. So if I go into a little detail and am pretty harsh in what I have to say, when I have said it, people will understand why. There should not be deficits.

I find it a little difficult to welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Health, who will answer the debate tonight. I am glad that he is here because he has answered some of my questions. The best comment that I can make is one that is often used, and I go along with it. One hates the sin and, in this case, respects the sinner, although for reasons which the Minister will know, but we need not go into now, my respect for him is a little less than it might have been 20 years ago.

The health service is still our prime public service. I think that it is the only one which still has the word "service" in its title, whereas agencies for this, that and the other constantly change their names. The health service is something we all cherish. Even the former right hon. Member for Grantham, now Baroness Thatcher, cherished it and assured us that it was in safe hands. It is now in the hands of the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell). I am afraid, however, that there is plenty of evidence to show that it is not safe. Indeed, I believe that there is enough evidence to show that, in practice, the health service is held in contempt—I use that word in its technical sense—as are those who wish to use it.

We should remember that the health service is one of care. It is a public service, and I hope it is not seen as too much of a party matter. Some of us on the Opposition Benches, and perhaps hon. Members on the Conservative Benches as well, believe that care is not a commodity. Care can only be genuinely given. That makes the health service a very particular service as against any other service. The way in which Ministers handle the health service and the deficit proves that, alas, it is held in contempt by the Government.

The destruction of the public services is instanced by the deficits of the health authorities. I wish to draw a distinction between that failing and those in politics who quite legitimately wish to narrow the ambit of the state—one can think of previous well-known Members of the House who wished to minimise the degree to which the state was involved in our community affairs. There is a temptation, however, to use that policy to justify anything

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

that undermines even a public service which exists as a skeleton one. The Public Accounts Committee will be aware of examples of such behaviour.

Mr. Gladstone approved of the state and of certain services being run by it, but they must be run properly, openly, effectively and efficiently. That is not happening with our health service. What is worse, when hon. Members wish to find out what is going on in order to warn people about it and try to get to the root of the problem, alas, as I will prove tonight, they are faced with obstruction and obfuscation. Worse than that, Members are held in contempt by the Government, as are those whom we represent. That is happening because of the Government's efforts to camouflage what is going on.

We in east London have a particular need of the health service. The East London and the City health authority extends through three of the most needy boroughs of the country. It also contains St. Bartholomew's hospital—just about—but I do not know for how much longer. Four or five hospitals in east London are closing. We have had three Adjournment debates in the House on the difficulties encountered in east London, which arise because of the needs of the people who live there, their occupations, their housing and their history. The majority of the electorate of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) has an overseas background. There are also many with similar backgrounds in the other two electorates in the borough.

Today on the radio we heard the great news of a £300 million investment in the London hospital, which is in part of our East London and the City health authority. Of course, Bart's will disappear, but such is the reliance on the private finance initiative that the £300 million of capital, perhaps a bit more, will mean a new medical complex on the site of the London hospital.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) had been given details of the great bid submitted by the contractor who won, but he only heard about the winner on the radio today. Such is the extent of the separation that a representative of the public now experiences. In this case, my right hon. Friend has been a distinguished Member of the House since 1964 and he has served in three or four Governments. Such was the treatment given to him concerning what is just about, although hardly recognisable as such, a public service.

In the press release that the managers of the new Royal London trust issued, they made it plain that the income to pay for the £300 million and the running of the hospital would come mainly from the revenue funders, the East London and the City health authority. That authority gets money from the Government and it then contracts with all sorts of providers, including the Royal London trust, for the provision of health services.

Let us start with the money that the Government do, or do not, give. There is a difficulty concerning the capitation formula that is used by the three boroughs of Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham in east London. I learnt to my surprise only this weekend that although a capitation formula and weighting are applied according to the nature of the population in terms of their need for acute hospital services, and although we have the Jarman index for general practitioners, there is no overall index, as yet—although it may be coming along—for GP services. They are the front line of the health service, however, and we were reminded of that just yesterday by the Secretary of State for Health. I leave to your imagination, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the deprivation that goes on at the front line. There is rationing all down the line because of the "provider and purchaser" arrangement: it cascades. The new guise of the London hospital, following the closure of other hospitals, will not do a great deal to improve the position. We have, in effect, rationing from the top down.

Even with the same resources, it would be possible to say to each unit, "That's your lot; work out your own priorities internally." But difficulties are involved in a system of contraction and competition. The actual amount of money involved is determined by the health service, right at the top; if there is more need, and the providers are having to push out more services, and the money is not there, that is it. That is what happened in the case of the East London and the City health authority: the division of the cake has been unjust on a national basis, and the authority is now in deficit.

Pressure has been placed on borough local services in particular—the social services that, as we know from recent unhappy examples, are "end on" to those of the health service. I hope that I can use the term "social services". We in Newham have a particular problem. Our standard spending assessment formula, which is a very controversial matter, is defective. I cannot go into the arithmetic deeply, but it means that we cannot always spend on education and social services what the Government allege that they give us. It does not work. I believe that the same is happening all over the country. Local government has its own financial problems.

Now I come to the actual figures, which are contained in a rather obscure set of documents—they were made public, yes—relating to the East London and the City health authority. I refer to the board agenda for 22 July, which has been set out and has, I think, been noticed by the community health councils.

The document to which I refer tells us that details of

"the Financial framework for 1996/97-2001/02 . . . are summarised below."

Those details show a recurrent deficit of £13 million for the current year, rising to £43 million in 1999-2000. In other words, even if the authority continued to provide what is currently an insufficient delivery, that would be the amount of debt that it would be accumulating. I know that that is a book total, but it may help if I quote from the footnote, which states:

"This forecast does not take account of as yet unquantified costs associated with existing service strategies e.g. Primary Care Development, Mental Health strategy. In addition, if any element of a deficit for a year is addressed using brokerage, the repayment of that brokerage will increase the deficit to be met in the following year."

In other words, there will be a cascade of debt.

It is possible that that debt could be met only by borrowing. That is generally the probability. It will see a business through a bad patch, but we are not talking about a business; we are talking about a service. I understand that at the moment—perhaps it is only temporary—district health authorities that have a little bit at the end of the year can make arrangements with each other allowing those that are in surplus, if there are any now, to balance the position with those that are in deficit. I will not say

that the system has worked reasonably well, but I understand that authorities have struggled along—up to now.

I do not believe, however, that deficits such as those shown in the health authority's report can sustain such a solution in the future, and that is the subject of the first question that I shall put to the Minister. I cannot see such deficits being allowed as they are now. That is problem No. 1.

I do not think that those figures were very well known, and I was shocked when I read them in July. I thought, "Crikey; if that is happening in east London, what is the national picture?" I therefore did what most Members of Parliament would do—I tabled a question. It was answered on 22 July—happily for the debate today, by the Minister present tonight.

Part of the question was:

"To ask the Secretary of State for Health"—

because he is responsible—

"if he will list for each district health authority for each of the financial years 1996-97 and 1997-98 and subsequent years for which figures can be given or estimated (a) the recurrent deficit".

I asked for some other figures, but I shall leave those out.

The Minister present tonight replied:

"The information requested is based on estimates subject to revision."

Of course they are subject to revision. That is what an estimate is. I believe the Minister has had experience of business. We all know that, do we not? It is a substitute for an answer. And here comes the plucker:

"It is not suitable for publication."—[*Official Report*, 22 July 1996; Vol. 282, c. *122*.]

When I read that sentence, I nearly broke the window. There we have a Minister of the Crown, sitting in this House now, replying to an hon. Member asking about a matter of public finance of importance to everyone, and he says that it is not suitable for publication.

What did I do? When we get into trouble or believe that there has been sharp practice—as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of us may be prone to it—we raise a point of order. The morning after I received the answer printed in *Hansard*, I raised a point of order and put everything on the record. I asked Madam Speaker:

"What are the appropriate means by which I can draw that matter to the attention of others? If the practice is more widespread, perhaps my raising this point of order will encourage other hon. Members who have received similar answers to take similar action."

The price of liberty is eternal vigilance, and if we do not obtain facts that allow us to find out what the Government are doing on our behalf, it is covered up, is it not?

The reply from Madam Speaker was:

"It is my understanding that the Select Committee on Public Service is currently inquiring into ministerial accountability. The hon. Member might help that Committee in its inquiries if he were to put the matter to it."—[*Official Report*, 24 July 1996; Vol. 282, c. 263.]

In fact, that Committee reported the next day, and in its recommendations, it made a specific point about Ministers not answering questions, not because they did not know the answers, but because the answers would embarrass the Government.

The Public Service Committee had therefore already reported but, by enormous coincidence, the same day, 24 July, as the very last business before the House dispersed for the summer recess—understandably, not many people were about—we debated the report of the new Standards and Privileges Committee. It is called "The Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament", HC 604 of the present Session. I quote from page 10 of that report—a paragraph labelled "Openness". It says:

"Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands."

I challenge the Minister to tell us what public interest clearly demands reticence in that answer. What possibly can there be? It is not about defence, foreign affairs or Ulster or Northern Ireland—in which case, even if it had been unnecessary, a phrase would probably have got away with it. I cannot imagine the reason.

The Minister had given an unforgivable answer, a point of order had been raised and there had been a flouting of a code of conduct that the Government have espoused—at least the Leader of the House had said that they did. He is a very respected Member, perhaps more respected than some other Cabinet members I could name. That was the assurance that he gave.

If the Government are contemptuous of the House and its Members, the public are not only justified in being contemptuous of Ministers but might be contemptuous of the House because they do not believe that the House has power. I believe that that factor was touched upon in an earlier debate today.

Because of my good fortune, I can raise another factor relating to that answer—one that affects the quality of public service. The answer of 22 July must have been written indirectly on the instructions, or with the connivance, of Ministers. We all know what happens—it happens in all our offices. Certain routine matters arise and we give instructions on the way that they should be tackled. It is a code of conduct for those who assist us in our work. That happens in private offices. It cascades all the way down through Departments. A Minister may say that he wants something tackled this way or that way; he says to take a certain line on one issue and a different line on another. If there is a difficulty, he will have a look at the matter and say what he thinks. How is it that such an answer as I received got through a private office in a Department of state? The only reason can be that, over the years—perhaps it is an inheritance—there has been a decline in the standard of public accountability and service.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): I am following with great interest the important points that my hon. Friend is making. He mentioned unsatisfactory answers from the Department of Health. Did he notice an answer that the Minister gave me this week? I asked about the amount of private capital that had been committed so far to health service schemes and to the private finance initiative. I was told that the information was not being collected. Does my hon. Friend agree that vital information that is necessary to evaluate the Government's performance in managing the health

[Mr. Stephen Timms]

service, and that we need to safeguard the interests of our constituents in terms of the viability of services, is not being provided by the Government?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I do not think that the PFI has much to do with health authority deficits, which is the subject of this Adjournment debate.

Mr. Spearing: With great respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I explained about the PFI as it relates to the Royal London hospital. If there is a repayment of capital to those who are supplying the capital, whether the City or whatever, that money must be paid via the district health authority. The Government must pay sufficient money—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not need a lecture from the hon. Gentleman on the workings of either the PFI or the health service. The context in which the matter was raised by the hon. Member for Newham, North–East (Mr. Timms) was not relevant.

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you know, I always bow to your ruling. However, may I remind you that this is a debate on the Adjournment of the House and therefore any grievance or matter related to the subject is in order, as I understand it? Please correct me if I am wrong.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is indeed a debate, for the hon. Gentleman, on the Adjournment, so he has a degree of width. The intervention was not appropriate.

Mr. Spearing: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When I raised the matter with Madam Speaker, I pointed out that answers often state that information is not kept centrally. All sorts of excuses are given, the latest being "not suitable", which I believe to be a contempt of Parliament. We have had a succession of unsatisfactory and wrong answers which should never have been given. The answer about which I have been speaking went over the edge and, as I shall claim later, is a contempt of the House.

Following that answer, the House was in recess for three months. How were the people in east London to cope with the already difficult conditions in their health services, in the borough council and in the hospitals, some of which were closing? All those problems are found throughout the country, even in leafy Hillingdon. I thought that the best thing to do would be to write a short letter to the Minister. However, upon reflection I decided to write to the Secretary of State because he is head of the Department and he is responsible. I have previous knowledge of the right hon. Gentleman. We spent a great deal of time in the House yesterday talking about the health service and I thought that he might be able to help.

I should read out some of the letter, which is dated 31 July. It states:

"You will probably be aware that there is widespread concern about deficits now being incurred by Health Authorities nationwide. There is particular concern in East London in general and Newham in particular, since there is evidence suggesting that not only do national capitation formulae not reflect the real needs of East London, but that the resources thereby made available to the East London and The City Health Authority (ELCHA) are not being equitably reflected in the contracts with the two provider Trusts serving Newham.

As the future cumulative deficit of ELCHA has been published, I assumed that comparable figures would be available nationwide, and thus put down a Written Question to you, for Answer on 22nd July. It was replied to by John Horam, and stated that the figures I requested were 'not suitable for publication'".

The letter then goes on to mention how I had raised a point of order with Madam Speaker, and then referred to the publication by the Public Service Committee of "Ministerial Accountability and Responsibility". I concluded the letter by stating:

"In the light of all these circumstances would you please:

1. Provide Answers by letter to the Questions as tabled;

2. Explain why the information was then considered 'not suitable for publication';

3. Explain why deficits, both at District and national level, are being incurred by DHAs, even when needs are not being met, and how this can be done within their accounting system when local authorities and other public bodies are unable to incur such deficits."

That letter seemed to me to be very reasonable—reasonably couched and, I hope, businesslike. I thought that I would receive a reply from the Secretary of State, but I received no reply in August and no reply in early September. My office received a holding letter from the Secretary of State's office on 21 August, and my office sent a reply to it on 17 September. There had been telephone calls between the offices—the "official layer"—but, still, I received no reply.

Therefore, I did what I think most hon. Members would have done, and I tabled another parliamentary question, which was due to be answered today. The question is No. 81 on today's Order Paper, and it states:

"To ask the Secretary of State for Health, when he received the letter dated 31st July from the honourable Member for Newham, South concerning his failure to answer his Written Question requesting information on Health Service deficits, of 22nd July, Official Report; when a substantive reply was sent; and for what reason the figures requested were regarded as being unsuitable for publication."

The reply from the Minister was:

"I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible."

I read that response about two and a half hours ago. I hope that, in the course of his reply, the Minister will give a full account, because the Minister has been given more time to think out the answer.

Today, there has been much talk in the press and across the country about the House, about what hon. Members can and cannot do and about what Back Benchers allow Whips to tell them to do or not to do. All hon. Members are not being dealt with contemptuously by the Government, although I could not care less about what people think about me or about the contempt that they may hold for me personally. I do care, however, about the 70,000 people whom I represent, and all those whom hon. Members—including the Secretary of State for Health and the Under–Secretary of State for Health—represent.

No Minister who is using public money out of public taxation, however, has the right not to provide reasonable answers to reasonable questions about the use of money for which they are but trustees and stewards. That principle is the basis of public service and the basis of democracy in the House. The failure to provide such answers is one of the reasons why, over past years, there has been increasing contempt not only for government but

for the way in which the Government—by various methods, including limited answers to questions and refusals to answer questions—have been in contempt of the House.

Unless the Minister has a very good reply—which he will find very difficult to make—I am minded to consider whether I should refer the entire matter to the new Committee as a contempt of Parliament.

9.24 pm

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North–East) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I assume that the hon. Gentleman has the Minister's permission to speak.

Mr. Timms: I was unable to seek the Minister's permission because of the early start of the debate. I hope that I shall nevertheless be allowed to speak briefly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I remind the hon. Gentleman that it is his duty and that of all hon. Members to take due note of the House's proceedings and not assume that a debate will take place at a set time.

Mr. Timms: I accept your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and am grateful for this opportunity to participate in the debate.

I reiterate the grave concern felt in east London about the scale of the deficit facing the East London and the City health authority. An exercise is being conducted within the authority to identify savings to bridge the gap in funding. We expect to be told the outcome of the review in the next month or so, but it is clear from what we know already that some draconian measures are being contemplated to bridge the gap that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) described.

My hon. Friend, and my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks), have said in previous debates that east London already suffers great deprivation and inadequate funding. That is true in the health service, as elsewhere. We now face making very large cuts to meet the gap in the health authority's budget. As has been said, it is not only in east London that such problems have arisen. I think that the biggest problem is in east London, but problems have arisen in other parts of London and elsewhere.

The report published by the Select Committee on Health just before the summer recess examined the way in which resources are allocated within the national health service, and especially the way in which the element of the funding for community health services is distributed. The Committee recognised, quite rightly, that there should be needs weighting in the way in which that part of health service funding is allocated. There is not, although it was certainly envisaged in the original research done by York university. It was removed from the formula for reasons about which we can only speculate. The Committee pointed out that there should be needs weighting for community health services as there is for all other aspects of the health service. The Committee stated specifically that areas such as east London have suffered most from the lack of needs weighting in the formula.

I know that the Minister intends to deal speedily with the problem of needs weighting for community health service resources, but I hope that he will do so speedily, to offer the residents of east London, and some of the other areas similarly affected by the forthcoming deficit, the prospect of some relief, and so that the draconian measures now being contemplated will not be required.

9.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I genuinely congratulate the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on raising this subject on the Adjournment. As he said, he was fortunate in having more time than usual to make his case. In fact, he has raised two subjects: the official subject of the debate, as it were, is health authority funding, which is an extremely important topic, but he has also raised, in parentheses as it were, the provision of information by Governments to the House of Commons. That is in many ways an even more important subject; it is certainly equally important.

However, the hon. Gentleman began by referring to yet another subject—the commitment to care in the health service. I shall say a few words about that before dealing with the main subject of the debate.

The NHS continues to deliver more and better health care more speedily and more efficiently than ever before. As the House knows, Government spending in real terms will be a massive 74 per cent. more in this current year than it was in 1978-79. As the House also knows, the Prime Minister, as recently as last Friday, reaffirmed the Government's commitment to ensuring that real terms additional funding is made available to the NHS year on year.

Undoubtedly, the NHS is one of the most efficient health services in the world; efficiency has increased by more than a quarter over the past 17 years. The Government have succeeded in slashing the times patients need to wait to be seen in hospitals. In 1990, 200,000 people were waiting more than 12 months for treatment. That figure is down to 10,000 today, which is a truly massive achievement. When the hon. Gentleman rightly talks about care in the health service, he should realise that this Government and our predecessor Conservative Governments have a great deal to be proud of.

All that has been achieved against a backdrop of steadily increasing demand, as a result of improvements in life expectancy and new and costly drugs and treatments becoming available. That has naturally resulted in a public expectation of more and better-quality services. Those they continue to get, but the pressure on the NHS continually to seek to be ever more efficient is bound to prevail.

As well as putting in additional funding year on year overall, we naturally expect that all health authorities and trusts will seek further to improve their efficiency. That ensures that more moneys released from bureaucratic procedures and ineffective treatments can then be channelled into direct health care provision.

Everyone is already aware that this Government have been very successful in driving down management costs in the NHS now that the reforms are fully in place. The efficiency scrutiny, examining current and future information, will also assist the NHS to achieve this redirection of funds into the provision of health care.

The internal market we have put in place is designed to encourage all such improvements, but it will also inevitably cause some pressure points to emerge in the

[Mr. John Horam]

interim. I have confidence that NHS managers will continue to deal effectively with those as a normal part of their planning and management functions. Nobody ever expected this to be an easy process, but the goal of providing better patient services makes it all well worth while. We therefore do not plan to ease up on the process which has proved successful so far.

I now turn to the release of financial information. For some time now, health authorities' audited accounts information has been made readily available, both locally by publication of accounts and nationally in response to questions in the House. In-year forecast results, which is what the hon. Gentleman was talking about, have also been available from time to time at individual health authority meetings, which inform the local population of the health care delivery plans and the associated financial implications envisaged by the relevant health authorities. In the hon. Gentleman's case, that is the East London and the City health authority.

Health authority plans, including all their financial implications, are regularly discussed with the regional offices of the NHS executive to inform their performance management role. The health strategies appropriate to local circumstances are, however, clearly matters for the health authority. Naturally, health authorities have to take into account changes in the health care needs of the local population, advances in medicine and clinical practice, and contract negotiations with the health care providers. Plans and forecast financial positions are therefore likely to change substantially throughout the year. They have not previously been considered appropriate for central publication, precisely because they can be revised and changed during the year.

We have recently been considering whether it would be possible to release such information without prejudicing local discussions over service delivery and funding, and without giving out information which we were aware would be likely to alter substantially over the coming months, and which might therefore sometimes be misleading. To do so would be potentially harmful to the successful delivery of patient care, by causing undue concern to all those providing and receiving health care in a particular locality.

In the majority of cases, it is possible to make revisions to plans without recourse to drastic changes to service configurations, to which the hon. Member for Newham, North–East (Mr. Timms) referred. In any case, such changes, as he and the hon. Member for Newham, South know, are subject to full consultation.

There remains some risk to the process, particularly if commentators do not allow health authorities to get on with the day-to-day planning and arrangements necessary to purchase appropriate services for their local population. However, having considered all the various aspects, including those raised by the hon. Gentleman, and—as I hope he appreciates: I owe him that courtesy—having listened to his arguments, which were put with great force and clarity, I have now concluded that it will be appropriate to make available centrally the forecast financial position of all health authorities in the country, not merely the one in London that the hon. Gentleman requested.

The appropriate figures provided by health authorities will shortly be made available to the hon. Gentleman. They will also be placed in the Library.

I shall say a word about those figures, as I know the hon. Gentleman is interested in them. Let us be clear what they represent. They are monitoring information for management. That is their purpose. They do not represent how things will turn out at the end of the financial year, but are a starting point for management action.

Mr. Spearing *indicated assent.*

Mr. Horam: I am glad to see the hon. Gentleman nodding. I am sure that he understands.

No one would expect a perfectly even spread of spending across the year. The figures may be volatile, and they may be revised. However, one would expect management to monitor trends in spending and take action where necessary. That is what good management is about. Good management needs good management information.

The figures that I will provide to the hon. Gentleman will be published along with the audited accounts for the end of the year. That will enable the full financial picture to be available to the public in the spirit of the open government initiative that the present Government have put in place.

I should say a few words about how health authorities monitor and control their expenditure, as I know that it concerns the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Horam: No. The hon. Gentleman has not spoken in the debate, and, having already given the hon. Member for Newham, North–East an opportunity to speak, I owe it to the hon. Member for Newham, South to answer his questions fully.

As the hon. Member for Newham, South is already aware, there are a number of health authorities whose monitoring suggests a need for management action during the remainder of the financial year. That does not suggest insurmountable problems. The health authorities concerned work closely with the NHS executive to balance priorities and make the necessary plans. Any corrective action should be designed to ensure the continued delivery of a high standard of health care. The financial options include reductions in working balances and brokerage arrangements with other health authorities.

Mr. Spearing: I thank the Minister for some explanation, which may or may not stand up. Had he written earlier, the reasons why he considered it unsuitable might have become clear.

However, from what the Minister has said, bearing it in mind that all Government expenditure is to some extent estimated, is he not now admitting that there is greater volatility in financial forward planning in the national health service which cannot be to the advantage of the service or to its users, and that that arises from the structure of purchaser and provider that the Government, in my view wrongly and foolishly, put in place?

Mr. Horam: No. With respect to the hon. Gentleman, that is not how it arises. Any volatility in the financial

position of a health authority during a year essentially arises as it does in any large organisation—through an imbalance between spending and income, which may occur over a short period and be evened out over the year.

At certain times of the year, any private sector business may earn high revenue and have low costs, while at other times the reverse will apply. For example, a Christmas card company would earn a huge amount of revenue at one time of the year, yet over an entire year a Christmas card company would calculate its profit taking into account expenditure and revenue.

Similarly, health authorities experience volatility in their spending, purchases and revenue, so the figures will vary from quarter to quarter. That does not mean that this essential unaudited management information will not be reconciled at the end of the year. I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands that.

I should like to make the simple point to the hon. Member for Newham, North–East that East London and the City health authority is the second highest beneficiary in the country under the existing needs element of the formula, and the third highest overall. As he knows, since he is a connoisseur of these matters, I accept that we are evaluating a proposed interim CHS-needs weighting based on the work of independent consultants, which may of course change the weighting in a way that may be helpful to inner-city areas such as those he represents.

Despite attempts to portray otherwise, the NHS is, as I said at the outset, better funded overall and in a better state than it has ever been. The finances of the NHS are under closer control than ever before, and a far better service is provided for the public, as witnessed by the greatly reduced waiting times and improvements in treatments available.

We have paid great attention to the subject of public accountability for the NHS, and in addition to the accounts information that has already been made available for some time, we will publish forecast information, as I described to the hon. Member for Newham, South. I trust that he agrees with me that we should all encourage responsible use of it to help rather than hinder the process of successful health care delivery to all our constituents.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 17 October 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Message to attend the Lords Commissioners:

The House went;—and, having returned:

Royal Assent

10.5 am

Madam Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that the House has been to the House of Peers where a Commission under the Great Seal was read, authorising the Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Public Order (Amendment) Act 1996

London Local Authorities Act 1996

Prorogation

Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech

Madam Speaker: I have further to acquaint the House that the Lord High Chancellor, one of the Lord Commissioners, delivered Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech to both Houses of Parliament, in pursuance of Her Majesty's Command. For greater accuracy, I have obtained a copy and also directed that the terms of the speech be printed in the Journal of the House. Copies are being made available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

The Duke of Edinburgh and I were pleased to receive the State Visits of His Excellency the President of France in May and the President of the Republic of South Africa in July. We remember with great pleasure our State Visits to Poland and the Czech Republic in March.

My Government were pleased to receive the President of the United States of America in London and Northern Ireland in November.

My Government have continued to make provision for the defence of the United Kingdom and our allies and for the promotion of international peace and stability. The United Kingdom was among the leading participants in peace support operations.

An Act has been passed to bring the law governing our Reserve Forces up to date, and permitting them to be used more flexibly.

My Government have continued to support the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and assumed the Presidency of the Western European Union between January and June. They welcomed the decisions on European security and defence at the Berlin meeting of the North Atlantic Council.

My Government played a full part in the successful conclusion of the Review Conference of the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, and in strengthening restrictions in the United Nations Weaponry Convention by negotiating a Protocol on the use and transfer of landmines and laser blinding weapons.

An Act was passed to implement the provisions of the Chemical Weapons convention in the United Kingdom, following which my Government ratified the Convention. They welcomed the opening for signature of a verifiable Comprehnsive Test Ban Treaty.

A leading role was played by my Government in securing the peace agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovna, which was signed in Paris. They held a conference in Lisbon which mapped out a strategy for implemening the agreement. In addition to contributing to the diplomatic effort to bring peace and stability to the region, they maintained over 9,000 Service men and women in the former Yugoslavia throughout the year as part of the NATO led military implementation force. My Government also contributed substantially to reconstruction projects to restore basic utilities to the people of Bosnia and rebuild their country. They helped to ensure the holding of elections supervised by the Organisaton for Security and Co-operation in Europe in furtherance of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

In the European Union, my Government promoted policies aimed at increasing competitiveness and sustainable economic growth. They participated in

[Madam Speaker]

meetings of the Intergovernmental Conference and in preparations for Economic and Monetary Union. They worked to encourage sound financial management in the European Community. They continued to support strongly the enlargement of the European Union, and welcomed the association agreement with Slovenia. A British team of observers participated at the Russian Presidential elections.

My Government worked for free trade through continuing negotiations within the World Trade Organisation, through the "New Transatlantic Agenda" agreed between the European Union and the United States, and through EU and bilateral contacts with Japan and other trading partners.

Support continued for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia in their transition to democratic market economies, through the Know How Fund and with our European Union partners.

My Government contributed fully to the first Summit of Asian and European nations, held in Bangkok, which marked an important development in relations between the two regions. In the interests of the people of Hong Kong, my Government continued to work towards a successful transfer of sovereignty to China in 1997.

Reducing poverty in the poorest countries remained a priority. My Government's advocacy of multilateral debt relief for the poorest, most indebted nations contributed to new arrangements being adopted by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Paris Club of bilateral creditors.

Vigorous action continued to be taken to protect the environment, and against terrorism, drugs, money laundering and organised crime, in the United Kingdom and overseas. Legislation was passed to enable to the Security Service to act in support of the police and other law enforcement agencies against serious crime. An Act has been passed, giving the police additional powers to combat terrorism.

In Northern Ireland my Government have continued to work towards a political settlement, based on a policy of dialogue with all the parties in Northern Ireland which are committed to peaceful and democratic methods and in co-operation with the Irish Government. They have maintained progress towards the improvement of economic and social conditions.

Members of the House of Commons

I thank you for the provision you have made for the honour and dignity of the Crown and for the public service.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government have pursued firm financial policies which have created the conditions for sustained economic growth, rising prosperity and falling unemployment while maintaining low inflation. Measures have been taken to ensure that the public sector borrowing requirement continues to fall.

My Government showed their commitment to improving the nation's competitiveness through the White paper "Competitiveness: Creating the Enterprise Centre of Europe." The United Kingdom continues to be the most successful country in the European Union in attracting inward investment. Legislation was passed to improve the system of arbitration for business and other users. Over 400 deregulatory proposals were brought forward.

My Government continued to pursue a programme of privatisation including the successful sale of British Energy and Railtrack. They made progress with public sector reform and involving the private sector in the delivery of public services.

An Act has been passed to provide a framework for the introduction of digital terrestrial broadcasting and to liberalise the regulation of cross-media ownership.

My Government have intensified action to eradicate BSE in the United Kingdom; have introduced vigorous measures in response to the market crisis in beef; and have secured European Union arrangements to support these efforts and a framework for lifting the beef export ban.

The criminal justice system has been strengthened through legislation to improve procedures in criminal cases, including those for prosecution and defence disclosure.

An Act has been passed to streamline the handling of asylum applications, to strengthen enforcement of immigration control and to restrict access to social benefits by people from abroad.

Legislation has been passed to make better provision for housing, taking forward my Government's strategy of continued growth in home ownership, provision of affordable social housing and a sustained revival in private renting; and to improve dispute resolution and payment procedures in the construction industry.

An Act has been passed to expand provision of nursery education and to allow grant maintained schools to borrow to improve their buildings.

Legislation was passed to enable local authorities to make payments to groups of people who want to purchase their own community care.

An Act has been passed which reforms the ground for divorce, introduces mediation into family proceedings and improves the law on domestic violence. Further law reform measures have been enacted.

In Scotland legislation was enacted to reform education and training and to improve the conservation and control of wild deer.

Other important measures have been enacted.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may attend you.

A Commission was also read for proroguing this present Parliament, and the Lord Chancellor said:

"My Lords and Members of the House of Commons: by virtue of Her Majesty's Commission which has now been read, we do, in Her Majesty's name, and in obedience to Her Majesty's Commands, prorogue this Parliament to Wednesday the twenty-third day of this instant October, to be then here holden, and this Parliament is accordingly prorogued to Wednesday the twenty-third day of this instant October."

End of the Fourth Session (opened on 15 November 1995) of the Fifty-First Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in the Forty-Fifth Year of the Reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 22 July 1996

PRIME MINISTER

Internet

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37239]

The Prime Minister: For these purposes, my Office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, on 18 July, *Official Report,* column *621.*

Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Prime Minister what inquiries to detect fraud by cross-checking his Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit he has undertaken; when these exercises took place; and how many staff were *(a)* suspended, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* prosecuted as a result. [37712]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* None, but where the Benefits Agency had reasonable grounds for suspicion that an individual might be involved in benefit fraud the Cabinet Office would respond to its inquiries. Employees found guilty of fraud or dishonesty are liable to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

Next Steps Review

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to publish the next steps review; and if he will make a statement. [36660]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 19 July 1996]:* The review will be published in the autumn so as to provide an input into ministerial discussions and subsequent decisions on public expenditure and resource allocation. The 1996 publication will continue the development of the review, providing trend data and other measures common across agencies and will also report on progress towards developing benchmarking or organisational performance.

TREASURY

Customer Charters

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* the customer charters which are currently in use within his Department and its executive agencies and *(b)* the charters which have been withdrawn. [32839]

Mrs. Angela Knight: HM Treasury does not have any customer charters nor has it withdrawn any. Of its executive agencies, the customer charters currently in use are listed. Neither the Royal Mint nor the Valuation Office has any customer charters, and no charters have been withdrawn by any of the agencies.

Office for National Statistics

Charter Statement for Customer and Suppliers

Paymaster

Paymaster Pensions—Assurance of Service

Paymaster CS Pensions—Standards of Service and what to do if things go wrong.

European Committee of Central Bankers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the Bank of England's membership of the European Committee of Central Bankers; and whose policies the bank represents on the committee. [37837]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The committee of governors of the central banks of member states of the European Community was dissolved on 1 January 1994, in accordance with articles 109f(1) and 109e(1) of the EC treaty.

Unemployment (Yorkshire)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what number of people in *(a)* North Yorkshire and *(b)* York had been registered unemployed for (i) six months or longer and (ii) 12 months or longer in (1) January 1992 and (2) January 1996; and what proportion these figures were of the total number of people registered as unemployed at these dates; [38030]

(2) what number of people aged under 25 years in *(a)* North Yorkshire and *(b)* York were (i) registered unemployed and (ii) had been unemployed for six months or longer in April 1990 and at each quarter thereafter. [38031]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested can be obtained from the Nomis database accessed by the House of Commons Library.

Credit Controls

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce selective controls on credit to reduce the rate of inflation in house prices. [38019]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have no intention of introducing selective credit controls for housing. The objective of monetary policy is to achieve underlying inflation in the lower half of the 1 to 4 per cent. range by the end of this Parliament and to keep it at 2½ per cent. or less thereafter. The growth in house prices is one of the many indicators I assess when determining what the appropriate level of interest rates is to achieve the inflation target.

Immigration

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many reports have been made by marriage registrars, from which registration areas, to the Registrar-General, that marriages are suspected to be

solely for immigration purposes, in 1994, 1995 and 1996 to the latest convenient date; and in how many of these instances information has been passed on to the Home Office. [38084]

Mrs. Angela Knight: During 1994 and 1995, superintendent registrars reported 470 and 555 cases to the Registrar-General where they suspected that a proposed marriage had been arranged for the sole purpose of evading statutory immigration controls. Of this number, information in respect of 404 and 467 respectively was passed to the Home Office.

During the first six months of 1996, 309 reports have been received, of which 232 have been referred to the Home Office. Details of the reports received by registration district are shown in the table.

District	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*[1]
Andover	—	—	1
Barking and Dagenham	—	1	—
Barnet	—	7	2
Barnsley	—	1	—
Belper	1	—	—
Birmingham	8	1	—
Blackburn	1	3	—
Blackpool and Fylde	—	—	1
Bolton	1	1	—
Bournemouth	1	1	2
Bradford	3	1	—
Brent	47	39	29
Bristol	—	—	1
Bromley	1	—	—
Cambourne and Redruth	1	—	—
Cambridge	2	1	
Camden	2	1	—
Chichester	1	1	—
Colwyn	1	—	—
Coventry	1	4	—
Croydon	1	2	2
Dacorum	1	1	—
Darlington	—	1	—
Depwade	2	2	—
Dudley	—	1	—
Ealing	10	12	1
Eastbourne	1	—	1
Fulham	—	1	—
Greenwich	3	5	—
Hackney	67	142	92
Hammersmith	—	—	1
Haringey	1	1	—
Harlow	1	5	—
Harrow	—	1	—
Hatfield	—	1	—
Havering	1	1	—
Hendon	14	14	3
Hereford	1	—	—
Hounslow	—	4	3
Huddersfield	—	—	1
Hull	—	1	—
Ipswich	1	—	—
Islington	50	25	6
Kensington and Chelsea	5	—	—
Kettering	—	1	—
Knowsley	1	—	—
Lambeth	1	7	—
Leicestershire Central	—	1	—
Lewisham	146	120	63
Lichfield	1	—	—
Luton	—	—	1
Manchester	1	2	—
Mansfield	—	1	—
Melton and Rutland	—	1	—
Merton	—	3	—
Mid Warwickshire	—	1	—
Milton Keynes	—	4	1
Newham	2	1	—
Norfolk	—	1	—
Northallerton	—	1	—
Northampton	—	1	—
Norwich	1	—	—
Nottingham	6	4	—
Oldham	7	6	2
Oxford	—	1	—
Peterborough	3	4	—
Portsmouth	—	2	1
Preston and South Ribble	—	1	—
Redbridge	9	6	2
Richmond upon Thames	1	—	—
Salford	—	2	—
Sedgemoor	1	—	—
Sheffield	1	1	1
Southend on Sea	1	—	—
South Glamorgan	1	—	—
Southwark	16	14	—
Stevenage	2	—	—
Stroud	—	1	—
Surrey South Western	—	1	—
Sutton	7	2	—
Swindon	—	—	1
Taunton Deane	—	1	—
Towcester	—	1	—
Tower Hamlets	3	58	83
Trafford	2	—	—
Waltham Forest	3	6	—
Weyland	1	—	—
Westminster	16	8	2
Weston Super Mare	—	1	—
Wolverhampton	2	4	2
Wrekin	2	1	—
Wycombe	2	3	4
Total	470	555	309

[1] January to end of June 1996 inclusive.

Footwear Industry

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females were employed in the United Kingdom footwear industry in 1975, 1979 and 1995. [38171]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The available comparable information is for 1978 onwards. This is provided in the following table:

Employees in footwear manufacture in Great Britain: June (thousands)[1]

Standard industrial classification 1992(SIC92)

	Male	*Females*
1978	16	48
1979	16	48
1995	14	15

Note:
[1] Unadjusted.
Source:
ONS.

House Prices

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Government are taking to restrain the increase in house prices. [38017]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Monetary policy is set in order to achieve underlying inflation in the lower half of the 1 to 4 per cent. range by the end of this Parliament and to keep it at 2½ or less thereafter. House prices are just one of the many indicators used in monitoring the outlook for inflation. House price increases are expected to be held in check as more sellers are encouraged back into the market.

Abortion

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown by gestation of the pregnancy of the abortions performed in the Anglia and Oxford region in the latest year for which figures are available. [38163]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The figures presented give a breakdown of the number of abortions performed to women usually resident in the Anglia and Oxford health region by gestation of pregnancy, for the year 1994.

Gestation of pregnancy in weeks	*Number of abortions*
Under 9	5,753
9–12	5,841
13–19	1,086
20 and over	192
Total	12,872

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many abortions have now been performed in total within the Anglia and Oxford region under the provisions of the Abortion Act 1967; and how many and what percentage of those abortions were performed in emergency to save the life of the mother. [38026]

Mrs. Knight: The total number of abortions carried out under the Abortion Act, to women usually resident in the Anglia and Oxford health region [1], from 1970 to 1994 [2] was 241,882. During this period, 10 abortions, 0 per cent. of the total number of abortions performed, were carried out in an emergency, certified by the operating practitioner as immediately necessary, to save the life of the woman[3].

Notes:

[1] Figures are based, where possible, on 1994 health authority boundaries. Other boundary changes have not been reflected in the figures.

[2] Figures for 1968–69 are not held on a comparable basis.

[3] Abortions performed under statutory grounds 5 (1970–31st March 1991) and F (1st April 1991–present) i.e. where in the case of emergency it was necessary to save the life of the woman.

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown by technique of the number of abortions performed in the Anglia and Oxford region in the latest year for which figures are available. [38161]

Mrs. Knight: It is not possible to give a reply, as abortion data are not routinely collected by technique.

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown by the procedure adopted of the number of abortions performed in the Anglia and Oxford region in the latest year for which figures are available. [38162]

Mrs. Knight: The figures presented give a breakdown of the number of abortions performed to women usually resident in the Anglia and Oxford health region by procedure, for the year 1994, the latest year for which figures are available.

Procedure	*Number of abortions*
Hysterotomy (only)	3
Hysterectomy (only)	3
Vacuum aspiration (only)	10,510
Vacuum aspiration with dilation and evacuation	535
Dilation and Evacuation	261
Other surgical	1
Prostaglandins (only)	263
Prostaglandins with other agents	199
Antiprogesterone with or without prostaglandin	1,078
Other medical	16
Other combined methods	3
Total	12,872

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many abortions have been performed within the West Midlands region under the provisions of the Abortion Act 1967; and how many and what percentage of those abortions were performed in emergency to save the life of the mother. [38346]

Mrs. Knight: The total number of abortions carried out under the Abortion Act, to women usually resident in the West Midlands health region [1], from 1970 to 1994 [2] was 351,747. During this period, nine abortions—0 per cent. of the total number of abortions performed—were carried out in an emergency, certified by the operating practitioner as immediately necessary, to save the life of the women[3].

Notes:

[1] Figures are based, where possible, on 1994 health authority boundaries. Other boundary changes have not been reflected in the figures.

[2] Figures for 1968–69 are not held on a comparable basis.

[3] Abortions performed under statutory grounds 5 (1970–31st March 1991) and F (1st April 1991–present) i.e. where in the case of emergency it was necessary to save the life of the woman.

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown by gestation of pregnancy of abortions performed in the West Midlands region in the latest year for which figures are available. [38347]

Mrs. Knight: The figures presented give a breakdown of the number of abortions performed to women usually resident in the West Midlands health region by gestation of pregnancy, for the year 1994, the latest year for which figures are available.

Gestation of pregnancy in weeks	*Number of abortions*
Under 9	6,560
9–12	7,134
13–19	2,081
20 and over	225
Total	16,000

The annual reference volume, 1994 Abortion Statistics, England and Wales, Series AB No. 21 is expected to be published on the 30 July 1996.

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown by age of the mother of the abortions carried out in the West Midlands region in the last five years. [38348]

Mrs. Knight: The figures presented give a breakdown of the number of abortions performed to women usually resident in the West Midlands health region by age of the woman, for the years 1990 to 1994 [1].

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Under 16	399	393	387	346	393
16–19	4,322	3,722	3,229	2,918	2,764
20–24	5,716	5,541	5,073	4,901	4,531
25–29	3,709	3,695	3,664	3,651	3,775
30–34	2,277	2,374	2,396	2,437	2,553
35–39	1,368	1,393	1,369	1,474	1,437
40–44	539	526	518	515	498
45 and over	50	45	53	63	48
Not stated	—	3	3	1	1
All ages	18,380	17,692	16,692	16,306	16,000

[1] Abortion Statistics, England and Wales, Series AB Nos. 17–21.

Inflation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect of *(a)* an increase of 10 per cent. in house prices and *(b)* an increase of 10 per cent. in the import price of manufactures on the rate of inflation. [38020]

Mrs. Angela Knight: House prices have a direct impact on retail prices index inflation through their effect on the following components: mortgage interest payments, depreciation, ground rent and estate agents' fees. The weights can be found in the Office for National Statistics RPI business monitor, MM23. These components include lagged values of house prices, so the initial effect of a rise in house prices is much smaller than the sum of the weights of these components.

The impact on inflation of a rise or fall in import prices depends on the extent to which import costs are passed through to retail prices.

Deaths

Sir Robert Hicks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many deaths have been recorded for each of the past 10 years in the period December to March. [38044]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The number of deaths in England and Wales occurring from December to March for the latest 10 years for which figures are available are shown in the table.

December to March	*Deaths*
1985–86	228,307
1986–87	204,090
1987–88	212,761
1988–89	201,492
1989–90	226,373
1990–91	214,839
1991–92	210,049
1992–93	198,124
1993–94	208,689
1994–95	203,932

Licences

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the licences issued by his Department; for what purpose they are issued; and what are the administrative costs involved for each. [37598]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* HM Treasury issues licences under the Coinage Act 1971 which permits companies or individuals to melt down or break up metal coin. Two licences were granted during 1995–96 and one during the current financial year. I am unable to give details of which companies the licences were given to as this would compromise their commercial activities. As the granting of a licence involves a simple exchange of letters, the cost is minimal.

Bad Debts

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the tax treatment of bad debts on loans made to organisations which are not bankrupt. [35936]

Mr. Jack *[pursuant to his reply, 8 July 1996, c.37–38]:* I regret that the answer was incomplete. It set out the position applicable to income tax payers, and to companies before the changes made in the Finance Act 1996 for corporate debt. However, the position for loans made by companies was amended as part of the wider reform of the tax rules for corporate debt included in the Finance Act 1996. Relief remains available for bad and doubtful debt. How it is given will depend on whether the taxpayer uses an "authorised accruals basis" or an "authorised mark-to-market basis": the aim so far as possible is to follow the company's accounts prepared for non-tax purposes. Relief where loans have been extended for non-trading purposes will in future be allowed on essentially the same terms as for trading loans. Anti-avoidance rules apply to loans made between connected parties.

TRANSPORT

Coaches (Safety)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what estimate his Department has made of the number of incorrectly fitted seat belts in coaches; [38551]

(2) what estimate his Department has made of the reduction in injuries likely to occur as a result of the fitting of three-point seat belts in coaches. [38550]

Mr. Norris: No estimate has been made.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress his Department is making in relation to the introduction of three-point seat belts in coaches. [38549]

Mr. Norris: My Department successfully sought early implementation dates for seat belts in coaches during negotiations on amending the European directive on seat belts. The directive will require three-point seat belts, or lap belts with energy-absorbing seats, from 1 October 1997 for new vehicle types and 1 October 1999 for all new vehicle registrations.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the safety coach seat designed by the Cranfield impact centre; and what proposals he has to ensure the mandatory introduction of this seat type on new coaches. [38552]

Mr. Norris: The Cranfield project demonstrated the technical feasibility of energy-absorbing seats which could be fitted with a three-point seat belt. It resulted in one technical solution, which may not necessarily be a viable commercial product.

I have no plans to require the mandatory fitment of this type of seat.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans Her Majesty's Government have to introduce the compulsory fitting of seat belts on coaches operating in the United Kingdom; [38644]

(2) what recent changes have occurred in European Union legislation which allow Her Majesty's Government to legislate for the compulsory fitting of seat belts in coaches travelling the United Kingdom. [38645]

Mr. Norris: Earlier this year, agreement was reached on an amendment to an EC directive which will require seat belts to be fitted in all new coaches. To comply with the directive, all new types of coaches from 1 October 1997 will be required to be fitted with three-point belts or lap belts with energy absorbing seats. This will be extended to all new registrations two years later. We intend to implement the requirements of the directive as soon as practicable.

Heavy Goods Vehicle Licences

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if drivers who have passed an HGV test at class 2 or class 3 prior to April 1991 will now be granted category C and E licences without the need to take an additional driving test. [38559]

Mr. Norris: We shall shortly be consulting on a range of issues arising from the second EC driving licence directive, including the treatment of these drivers.

Motorway Traffic

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of *(a)* all traffic and *(b)* traffic on motorways and trunk roads is represented by (i) heavy goods vehicle and (ii) public service vehicle journeys of under (1) two miles and (2) five miles in length as shown in chart 1A of the document "Transport—The Way Forward." [38600]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is not available.

Heavy Goods Vehicles (Safety)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to introduce the compulsory wearing of seat belts by HGV drivers. [38601]

Mr. Norris: The wearing of seat belts by HGV drivers is already compulsory in goods vehicles which have them fitted.

Seagoing Skills

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date his Department received the first draft of the study to assess the shore-based demand for United Kingdom seagoing skills; and if he will give the reasons underlying the interval before publication. [38558]

Mr. Norris: The report "A study of the UK economy's requirements for people with experience of working at sea" was commissioned in February 1995 by the Department of Transport, the Chamber of Shipping and The Marine Society. The full draft of the report was delivered in May 1996. It was published on 18 July 1996.

The intervening period was to allow the Department and the co-sponsoring organisations to digest the report and to make the arrangements for publication.

Heavy Goods Vehicles (Accidents)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the number of road accidents resulting in *(a)* fatal, *(b)* serious, and *(c)* slight injuries, involving (i) articulated, and (ii) draw bar heavy goods vehicles from *(A)* 1986 to 1990, and *(B)* 1991 to 1995. [38779]

Mr. Norris: The information is shown in the table.

Number of accidents[1] involving articulated and draw bar heavy goods vehicles: GB 1986 to 1995

	HGV—Articulated	*HGV—Drawbar[2]*
1986	3,880	347
1987	4,170	305
1988	4,564	332
1989	4,829	408
1990	4,578	379
1991	4,273	448
1992	4,180	428
1993	4,246	456
1994	4,174	351
1995	4,077	362

[1] May include double counting—in cases where two or more HGVs are involved in the same accident.

[2] HGV towing a single, double or multiple trailer.

Wheelchairs

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the safety aspects of carrying occupied wheelchairs in moving taxi cabs. [38785]

Mr. Norris: The Department has conducted research on carrying wheelchairs in moving vehicles over a number of years. The results of that work have already been applied to existing designs of purpose-built wheelchair-accessible taxis and will be reflected in the taxi accessibility regulations which we will be introducing under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

In practical terms, many thousands of journeys have been undertaken by wheelchair users in taxis over many years. The Department is not aware of any incident in which the carriage of a wheelchair, appropriately positioned and restrained, has caused any difficulty.

Heathrow Airport (Approach Road)

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans exist to improve the approach road to London from Heathrow along the M4 and beyond; and if he will instigate a competition to *(a)* design landscaping on embankments, *(b)* improve central reservations and *(c)* site sculptural works so as to give a better impression to visitors and the pubic. [38422]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Robert Banks, dated 22 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about visually improving the M4 and A4 from Heathrow.

In accordance with the Green Corridor Study completed last year, and the Landscape Strategy for London's Trunk Roads launched at the end of last year, proposals are now being developed for the M4 and surrounding area in London. Consideration will be given during this work to opportunities for individual design competitions.

Much good work has already been completed on the A4, including significant tree planting and three improvement schemes to provide new hardened central reserves and ornate guardrailing between Hammersmith Flyover and Chiswick Roundabout. A fourth scheme, to provide similar treatment from Gliddon Road to North End Road, is planned for September this year.

Travel Passes

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of travel passes currently issued to *(a)* deaf and *(b)* other disabled people in (i) Ealing and (ii) other London boroughs; what were the equivalent figures for 1995; and if he will make a statement. [38264]

Mr. Norris: Information on permits issued for the period April 1996 to March 1998 is not yet available. For the period April 1994 to March 1996, London local authorities issued 62,365 permits to blind people and disabled people. The equivalent figure for the London borough of Ealing was 4,986. The number of permits issued to deaf persons is not recorded centrally.

Railtrack

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers he has to ensure that the majority of shares in Railtrack remain in the ownership of United Kingdom-based investors. [38532]

Mr. Watts: None.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers he has to remove Railtracks's operating licence. [38534]

Mr. Watts: The terms as to revocation of Railtrack's network and station operating licences are contained in the schedule to those licences. The Secretary of State may, after consultation with the regulator, and in the case of the network licence, the franchising director, revoke the licences on three months notice in certain circumstances including:

by agreement with Railtack; or

non-compliance by Railtrack within three months with an enforcement order in respect of a contravention or apprehended contravention of a licence condition; or

a person obtaining control of Railtrack which the Secretary of State has not approved and the Secretary of State serves notice of revocation unless that person ceases to have control and the required cessation does not take place; or

in the case of the network licence only, cessation of licensed activities for a continuous period of one year.

The Secretary of State may also, after consultation with the regulator and, in the case of the network licence, the franchising director, revoke the licences forthwith if Railtrack commits a serious breach of the Railways (Safety Case) Regulations 1994.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of the shares of Railtrack are currently owned by investors based outside the United Kingdom. [38533]

Mr. Watts: This is a matter for Railtrack.

Rolling Stock

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of the rail franchises let, the number of mark 1 rolling stock projected to be in operation for the years 1997 to 2003. [38524]

Mr. Watts: No. It is not possible to project with accuracy what vehicles will be in service over the period 1997 to 2003. The number and type of vehicles that franchise operators use for services will depend on, among other things, changes in passenger demand, the level of services offered in excess of the passenger service requirement, the productivity improvements that franchise operators are able to achieve, and any safety requirements of the Health and Safety Executive.

I have set out in the table details of the rolling stock at the time each franchise was offered for tender in respect of its mark 1 fleet and any subsequent obligations that the successful franchise has entered into the respect of these vehicles.

LTS Rail

It is expected that the 28 units of the class 302 fleet which are of mark 1 construction will be replaced completely by modern class 317 units displaced from West Anglia Great Northern following the introduction of class 365/5 stock to WAGN in due course.

South West Trains

At franchising the South West Trains fleet included seven class 412 units, 34 class 421 units and 77 class 423 units which are all of Mark 1 construction and represent 46 per cent. of that fleet by number of vehicles.

Network SouthCentral

At franchising the Network SouthCentral fleet included 15 class 20X units, 78 class 421 units 23 class 422 units and 39 class 423 units which are of mark 1 construction and represent 66 per cent. of that fleet by number of vehicles.

Gatwick Express

The existing fleet is not of Mark 1 construction, but the franchise operator is planning to replace it in 1999 with a new fleet as a condition of a longer franchise period.

Great Western, InterCity East Coast, Midland Main Line

These Train Operating Companies have no mark 1 vehicles in their existing fleets.

Railtrack (Debt Management)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements have been made for the management of the debts of Railtrack transferred to a Government-owned company. [38588]

Mr. Watts: The Department of Transport is responsible for the management of the Railtrack debts transferred to DoA Ltd., a company wholly owned by the Crown.

British Railways Board Subsidiaries

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many subsidiaries of the British Railways Board have closed down having failed to find a buyer since 1992; and how many jobs have been lost as a result. [38547]

Mr. Watts: The following businesses of the British Railways Board have closed having failed to find a buyer. The number of posts for each of these businesses is also listed; BR's policy is to redeploy staff where possible. The number of actual redundancies would have been less.

	Posts
Taunton Concrete Works	37
Grove Management Development	25
Materials Engineering Group	31

Rail Privatisation

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the amount spent on (i) accountants, (ii) consultants, (iii) lawyers and (iv) other professionals in relation to railway privatisation for each year since 1992. [38586]

Mr. Watts: Expenditure by my Department, the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and the Office of the Rail Regulator since 1992–93 is as follows:

£ thousand

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Accountants	1,702	1,992	5,035	8,837
Lawyers	1,393	4,679	10,659	17,479
Other consultants and professionals	2,405	5,757	11,665	25,401

Expenditure by British Rail and Railtrack is a matter for the organisations themselves, but we understand that their total privatisation costs to the end of 1995–96:

£ million

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
British Rail	—	92	85	101
Railtrack	—	—	46	32

Any breakdown of the figures for BR and Railtrack would be for the organisations themselves to provide.

Office of Passenger Rail Franchising

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the percentage of existing timetables which have been guaranteed in each of the passenger service requirements and draft passenger service requirements so far published by Opraf. [38526]

Mr. Watts: No. The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Moreover, a percentage for each passenger service requirement—PSR—would be an average and thus not reflect the basis on which PSRs are prepared. When drawing up PSRs, the franchising director is required by his instructions and guidance from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consider each service individually and not services for the franchise as a whole. The differing characteristics of the many services operated under each franchise are thus reflected in the individual specifications include din PSRs.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what instructions he has given to Opraf to ensure that franchise operators provide services which connect with one another. [38527]

Mr. Watts: The franchising director is required by his instructions and guidance from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to encourage co-operation between operators to preserve and promote arrangements which facilitate the making of journeys which involve the use of services provided by more than one operator. In line with this, each franchise agreement includes provisions requiring operations to co-operate in the development of timetables so as to secure the provision of reasonable connections between services. In addition, the franchising director may specify connections in passenger service requirements where he believes these are of particular importance.

Aircraft Accident Simulation

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has been undertaken by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Civil Aviation Authority into the development of a computer model to simulate real aircraft accident conditions. [38553]

Mr. Norris: The Civil Aviation Authority has carried out extensive work in the development of computer models to simulate passenger evacuation in emergencies. To be of use, such models must predict real life with an acceptable level of accuracy. The CAA is currently collecting data from all possible sources to compare the predictions of computer models with actual outcomes. When this work is completed, the potential value of computer models will become clearer.

Aircraft (Safety)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has been undertaken by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Civil Aviation Authority into the benefits of the introduction of (i) rear-facing seats and (ii) three-point seat belts in aircraft. [38590]

Mr. Norris: None. The Civil Aviation Authority considered undertaking research into rear-facing seats but this did not proceed beyond the feasibility study stage because of the practical difficulties involved with this seating configuration. However, this subject may be discussed by the international group for cabin safety research of which the CAA is a member.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has been undertaken by the Civil Aviation Authority into the effect of water misting sprays in aircraft; and what assessment he has made of the effects on evacuation times of such systems. [38554]

Mr. Norris: The Civil Aviation Authority participated in the international cabin water spray research management group, which oversaw a programme of

research in this area. The programme concluded that cabin water spray systems would be of benefit only in specific and rare circumstances and that the costs associated with the installation and operation of these systems cannot be justified when compared with the potential benefits. The conclusions of the research programme were published in June 1993—CAA paper 93012.

Emergency Towing Vessel Coverage

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to provide year-round emergency towing vessel coverage in *(a)* the Dover strait, *(b)* north-western Scotland and *(c)* the western approaches. [38557]

Mr. Norris: There will be trials in the Dover strait, north-western Scotland and the south-west approaches for a period of six months this winter. We will continue to assess the results of the emergency towing trials before deciding on future commitments.

British Railways Board

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he is making to ensure the British Railways Board maintains expertise in running trains against the event of a franchise being surrendered. [38529]

Mr. Watts: None. In the event that a franchise agreement is terminated and another agreement is not entered into at the same time, the franchising director is required under the Railways Act 1993 to secure the continued provision of passenger services. Generally, he would do this by transferring to another company the business in respect of which the franchise agreement had been terminated. It is expected that the staff of the business would also be transferred, ensuring that the expertise needed to run the passenger services safely, and with continuity, would remain available to the business. In the event that any staff of the business who were essential to its safe operation did not so transfer, arrangements are in place to ensure that they would quickly be replaced with suitably skilled staff.

Channel Tunnel (Safety)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect of a fire aboard a semi-open wagon of a freight train travelling through the channel tunnel; and what assessment he has made of the reduction in the risk to public safety from the introduction of enclosed wagons. [38593]

Mr. Watts: An assessment of the likely frequency and effects of a fire on board a semi-open heavy goods vehicle shuttle train formed part of Eurotunnel's formal application for an operating certificate for this service. The intergovernmental commission, having received advice from the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority and from the Maitre d'Oeuvre, independent project managers and advisers to the commission, granted the operating certificate on 14 May 1994.

The Intergovernmental Commission has not been asked to examine any further risk assessments resulting from the use of enclosed wagons on HGV shuttle trains.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the results of the tests relating to the evacuation of trains travelling through the channel tunnel. [38592]

Mr. Watts: Tests relating to the evacuation of trains in the channel tunnel have been carried out by the operator, Eurotunnel. The methodology and conclusions of these tests were examined and found acceptable by the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority. Publication is a matter for the operator.

Road and Rail Construction Costs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the average construction cost per mile of the electrification of railways together with rate of construction per mile of new roads built since 1980. [38546]

Mr. Watts: The information is not available in the form requested. However, the cost of upgrading the east coast main line, including electrification, was around £360 million at current prices, equal to around £1 million per mile.

Information on the construction cost per mile of new roads is available only since 1989–90. For the period 1989–90 to 1995–96, the average construction cost per mile of all-purpose dual carriageway trunk roads was around £6 million and the average construction cost per mile of motorways was around £14 million, both at current prices. These figures exclude design fees, VAT, land and other compensation costs, site supervision and contractual claims.

Rail Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new rail vehicles and of what type are currently stored in sidings awaiting Railtrack approval for use. [38589]

Mr. Watts: This is a matter for the vehicle owners and Railtrack.

Le Shuttle Services

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action his Department has taken to implement the recommendation of the first report of the Home Affairs Committee, HC Paper 23 of Session 1991–92, in respect of the separation of elderly and disabled passengers from coaches aboard Le Shuttle. [38591]

Mr. Watts: The Government response to the Home Affairs Committee made it clear that the tunnel had been built to provide full access for all passengers, whatever their mobility problems, and that procedures would be devised for routine travel and emergency evacuation for people with mobility problems. These procedures are now complete and are contained in Eurotunnel's safety arrangements.

When Eurotunnel made its formal application to the Intergovernmental Commission for an operating certificate to enable it to carry coaches in single-deck wagons on tourist shuttle trains, it included supporting evidence showing the results of evacuation tests carried out with the participation of elderly and disabled passengers.

The Intergovernmental Commission, on advice from the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority and from the Maitre d' Oeuvre, independent project managers and advisers to the commission, gave approval to the application in June 1995.

A46/A47 Link Road

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if additional information required by his Department on induced traffic for the Leicester A46/A47 link road will cover the wider area set out in the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment report. [38918]

Mr. Watts: The additional information requested by my officials on the A46/A47 link road relates specifically to the issue of induced traffic as highlighted in the SACTRA report. My Department has issued guidance to all local highway authorities on how best the effects of induced traffic may be assessed. The information, to be provided, by Leicestershire county council, should be in line with that advice.

Road Link Ltd. (A69)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the management of the A69 by Road Link Ltd. [38635]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 22 July 1996:

As you know, the Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for a statement about the management of the A69 by Road Link (A69) Limited.

The A69 contract is the first to be awarded as a Design Build Finance and Operate (DBFO) scheme. This particular contract was won by Road Link (A69) Limited who are now responsible for the detailed design of the Haltwhistle Bypass scheme and its subsequent construction, together with the day to day operation and maintenance of the A69 between Carlisle and Newcastle. The concession period will last for 30 years during which Road Link will be reimbursed through "shadow tolls" paid by the Highways Agency. The Secretary of State for Transport, however, remains the highway authority for the A69 trunk road and this function cannot be delegated to the DBFO Co.

Road Link are employing the A69 Construction Joint Venture (a consortium of Morrison Construction, Christiani & Neilson Ltd, Henry Boot Construction and Impregilo S.p.A, with design support from Pell Frischmann Consultants) to construct the A69 Haltwhistle Bypass.

The construction of the Bypass is currently making good progress and should be completed as programmed in August 1997. After that, there will be some minor works on the old trunk road once the new Bypass is opened to traffic.

Bus and Coach Directive

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the companies and organisations he has consulted in connection with preparing a response to the European Commission's draft bus and coach directive. [39132]

Mr. Norris: Although we have not yet received any formal proposals from the Commission, my Department has been widely consulting with organisations, including the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, which represents major UK manufacturing interests, and the Coach and Passenger Transport Executive Group, which represents the major bus and coach operators in the UK.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Repossessions (York)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many actions for repossession of a mortgaged home were started, and how many repossessions were granted, in York county court in each of the last seven years. [38873]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 22 July 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about repossession proceedings at York County Court.

The following table shows the number of possession actions started and the number of possession orders made at York in the last seven years. As not all orders result in the issue and execution of a warrant of possession, I am unable to tell you how many properties were repossessed in this period.

	Actions commenced	*Orders made*
1989	368	193
1990	505	314
1991	577	455
1992	456	405
1993	346	316
1994	358	274
1995	332	237

Offenders (Psychiatric Assessments)

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many offenders have been referred for psychiatric assessments from magistrates courts for each of the last five years *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the west midlands; and at what cost. [37733]

Mr. Streeter: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Children Act 1989

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will place in the Library a copy of all guidance issued by his Department concerning implementation of section 8 orders under the Children Act 1989. [37585]

Mr. Streeter: The Lord Chancellor's Department produced guidance on the provisions of and procedures under the Children Act for court staff and judiciary at the time of its implementation in October 1991. Similar information was produced in conjunction with the Home Office for the use of practitioners and other relevant

professionals. These refer to section eight orders in general terms, but do not give specific guidance on their implementation.

The Children Act Advisory Committee, an independent body to which the Department provides the secretariat, has responsibility for monitoring the operation of the Act and issues guidance on its provisions. The committee publishes an annual report, copies of which are already held by the Library.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Quota Hopping

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the Government propose to table treaty changes at the intergovernmental conference to regulate quota hopping; and if he will make a statement. [39014]

Mr. Baldry: A proposal to add a protocol to the treaty of the European Community to enable member states to take appropriate action to regulate quota hopping is being tabled at a working meeting of the inter governmental conference today. The protocol provides that

> "nothing in the Treaty establishing the European Community shall prevent any Member State from distributing the fishing availabilities allocated to it under the common fisheries policy to vessels flying the flag of, or registered in, that State in accordance with such requirements as the Member State considers appropriate to ensure that such vessels have a real economic link with the populations dependent on fisheries and related industries in that State including, for example, all or any of the following requirements:
>
> a requirement that a minimum proportion (determined by the Member State concerned) of the legal and beneficial ownership of such vessels should be held either by nature persons residing permanently int he territory of that State, or by companies or firms which have their principal place of business or central administration (or both) in the territory of that State, or by a combination of natural persons and companies or firms fulfilling the above criteria;
>
> a requirement that a minimum proportion (determined by the Member State concerned) of the membership of the crews of such vessels should reside permanently in the territory of that State;
>
> a requirement that such vessels should depart from a port situated within the territory of the Member State concerned on a minimum proportion (determined by that State) of the fishing trips undertaken by such vessels;
>
> a requirement that a minimum proportion (determined by the Member States concerned) of the catches of all or any of the different fish stocks which may be made by such vessels should be landed within the territory of that State."

Copies of the full text of the proposed protocol and of the covering memorandum to the IGC are being placed in the Libraries of both Houses for information.

Veterinary Medicines Directorate

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the 1995–96 annual report and accounts for the Veterinary Medicines Directorate is due to be published. [39013]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I am pleased to report that the Veterinary Medicines Directorate's annual report and accounts for 1995–96 was published today. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

The report charts the continuing success of the directorate as a next steps agency, and I would like to congratulate the chief executive and his staff on their considerable achievements during the year.

British Beef

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to promote a public relations campaign extolling the safety of British beef. [32780]

Mrs. Browning: Product promotion and advertising is primarily a matter for the industry. The Ministry is actively involved in a programme to help promote beef. I am pleased that the Meat and Livestock Commission is running a campaign to reassure consumers about minced beef.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has *(a)* commission and *(b)* evaluated to establish the route by which contaminated feed was fed to bovine animals after the 1988 ban. [35000]

Mrs. Browning: Results of the investigation of risk factors for cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy born after the introduction of the ruminant protein feed ban were published in the "Veterinary Record" on 1 April 1995—pages 312 to 318. A copy of the report can be found in the May 1995 progress report, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he proposes to take to locate those animals which are within a condemned cohort which were previously sold on from the farm where they were bred; and what assessment he had made as to whether those who purchase cattle are keeping records in the same way as those responsible for dairy herds. [38098]

Mrs. Browning: Animals in the same cohort as a BSE case will be traced using farmers' records for cattle, which legislation under the Animal Health Act 1981 obliges them to keep.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will revise the arrangements for the destruction of whole cohorts of cattle where one animal within that cohort is found infected with BSE; and what is his latest estimate of the number of cattle which will have to be destroyed under the proposed arrangement. [38107]

Mr. Baldry: The Government issued a consultation document on the accelerated slaughter scheme on 3 July. They are considering responses to this. The maximum number of cattle likely to be slaughtered under the arrangements set out in the consultation document is 120,000 and in practice is liable to be somewhat lower.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the effect upon the price of replacement cattle if the numbers of cattle to be destroyed under the BSE eradication arrangements are at the highest level of his estimates. [38097]

Mrs. Browning: The accelerated slaughter scheme is not expected to involve more than about 1 per cent. of the total UK cattle population—although it is likely to have a

greater effect on dairy than beef herds. Details of the scheme, and therefore estimates of its likely effects, are yet to be finished.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those constituencies he has visited in the last three months on official business and those constituencies he intends to visit in the next three months; and if he will make a statement. [35761]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have visited the following constituencies on official business in the last three months:

Constituency	*Event*	*Date*
Gainsborough and Horncastle	Lincolnshire Show	19 June 1996
Cirencester and Tewksbury	Royal Show	1 July 1996
Lincoln	Upper Witham Internal Drainage Board	8 July 1996
Stamford and Spalding	Elsoms Seeds Ltd.	8 July 1996

During the next three months I plan to visit:

Constituency	*Event*	*Date*
Eddisbury	Reaseheath College (Meeting with Beef/Dairy Farmers)	15 July 1996
Congleton	Wimboldsely Hall/Weaver Bank Farm	15 July 1996
Stamford and Spalding	CLA Game Fair	26 July 1996

Cattle Slaughter Scheme

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, under the accelerated slaughter scheme, compensation for cattle slaughtered will be to the value of a replacement heifer of the same breed and standard of the culled cow. [36837]

Mr. Baldry: The Government issued a consultation document on the accelerated slaughter scheme on 3 July. The deadline for responses was 9 July, and we are considering those we have received.

EU Standing Veterinary Committee

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the United Kingdom was represented at the meeting of the EU Standing Veterinary Committee meeting of 9 and 10 October 1990; and if he will make a statement on the conclusions concerning BSE arising from the meeting. [37866]

Mrs. Browning: The United Kingdom was represented at this meeting. Our record of the meeting shows that, although BSE was discussed, no conclusions were reached.

Fisheries Committee (European Parliament)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many seats the UK is entitled to on the Fisheries Committee of the European Parliament; and how many seats the UK currently occupies. [38404]

Mr. Baldry: The UK is entitled to have five full members on the Fisheries Committee of the European Parliament and two substitute members. UK members of the European Parliament currently occupy all five full seats.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Postage Costs

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee how much has been spent on postage costs for the House in each of the last five financial years. [38637]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: Postage costs for the House of Commons for the last five financial years are as follows:

1991–92: £1,304,419
1992–93: £1,451,836
1993–94: £1,760,770
1994–95: £1,771,183
1995–96: £1,710,899.

Members' Salaries

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many hon. Members notified the Fees Office after each increase in salary during the past 17 years that they did not wish to accept an increase in their salary; and for how long they maintained such decisions. [36772]

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) on 10 July, *Official Report*, column *238*. I have asked the Fees Office to write to the hon. Member with such additional information as it feels can properly be provided without incurring disproportionate cost, bearing in mind also its obligation to preserve confidentiality in its dealings with individual hon. Members.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Lord President of the Council when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his question, for answer on 11 July, in respect of salaries. [38789]

Mr. Newton: I have replied to the hon. Member today.

Mail

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee how many items of mail were delivered to the House in each of the last five financial years. [38638]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: This information is not recorded. Royal Mail estimates that 35,000 items are received on each sitting day and that this figure has not changed significantly over the last five financial years. This does not include items delivered via courier and messenger services.

ENVIRONMENT

Air Pollution

Mr. Barry Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account the Environment Agency is obliged to take of *(a)* general air quality standards in a locality and *(b)* the cumulative effects of other emissions into the atmosphere in determining whether to grant an authorisation. [37839]

Mr. Clappison: Under section 7 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Environment Agency is obliged to set such specific conditions as it considers appropriate to achieve any quality standards or quality objectives prescribed by the Secretary of state under any relevant enactments.

Asbestos

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with other European Ministers on the production and use of asbestos-based building materials; and if he will make a statement. [38188]

Mr. Clappison: No discussions on the use of asbestos-based building materials have taken place at ministerial level, but our officials continue to play an active part in EU negotiations and to promote awareness and understanding in EU discussion of asbestos issues.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures his Department has taken to ensure asbestos-based building materials are clearly marked. [38186]

Mr. Clappison: The Asbestos Products (Safety) Regulations 1985 as amended require that any products containing asbestos are labelled in accordance with the schedule to the regulations. The label serves as a warning that asbestos is present, and gives details of precautions to be taken in handling the product.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated regarding the use of asbestos-based building materials in house building. [38185]

Mr. Clappison: The Department of the Environment has commissioned research on fibrous materials in the non-workplace environment. This includes a review of the past and current uses of asbestos in products and building materials. A report on this research will be published early next year.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to promote a ban on the import and use of asbestos-based building materials; and if he will make a statement. [38187]

Mr. Clappison: The United Kingdom takes the view that prohibitions on the marketing and use of asbestos, including asbestos-based building materials, should be based on agreements within the European Union. The Asbestos (Prohibitions) Regulations 1992 and their Northern Ireland equivalents implement EU legislation which totally prohibits the use of blue and brown asbestos, and some uses of white asbestos, in building materials. At present, the UK has no plans to promote an EU discussion for an extension of the existing ban.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what statistics he has collected on the number of deaths from exposure to asbestos products. [38184]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Health and Safety Executive maintains a register on the number of deaths from mesothelioma and asbestosis, which are mostly related to exposure to asbestos fibres. This is published in "Health and Safety Statistics", the statistical supplement to the Health and Safety Commission's annual report.

Merseyside Development Corporation

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will meet the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside, to discuss matters affecting his constituents living in the Merseyside development corporation area; and if he will make a statement. [38863]

Sir Paul Beresford: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to his constituents living at the Albert dock. For the most part, the issues raised by the residents at the dock have been matters for the residents to resolve themselves with the Merseyside development corporation or Arrowcroft. In those circumstances, I cannot see a meeting would be helpful. A meeting has, however, been arranged between Merseyside development corporation, the Government office for Merseyside and the Albert dock residents association to hear views on the proposed management company.

Albert Dock Company

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who are the owners of the Albert Dock Company; and if he will make a statement. [38839]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Albert Dock Company is owned by Arrowcroft.

Rising Sun Sports Ground, Wallsend

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will call in for determination planning application NT074496DM made to North Tyneside council for development at the Rising Sun sports ground, Wallsend. [38787]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State is aware of this application for five houses and two bungalows at Kings road, Wallsend and has asked the council for more information about it. When he has received this, he will consider the issues raised by the application and decide whether to call it in. I have asked the Government office for the north-east to write and let the hon. Member know his decision.

Planning Inspectorate

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what performance targets he has set for the Planning Inspectorate for the financial year 1996–97; and how these compare with targets and outturns for earlier years. [38262]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have today set new performance targets for the Planning Inspectorate which reflect changes in the content and priorities of its work load. Since its launch in 1992, the proportion of inspector resources devoted to development plan inquiries has

grown rapidly from just under 20 per cent., to 32 per cent. last year. The new targets announced today reflect this change. Taken as a package, they are demanding and will require the agency to work more effectively if they are to be met.

In particular, the timeliness target has been extended to embrace the three different methods of handling appeals. This replaces the previous target which was confined to written appeals and which did not take into account the more difficult appeals which take longer.

The principal objectives will be to continue to preserve the impartiality and quality of the inspectorate's work while seeking further to improve efficiency.

In detail, the key targets for the agency's work in England for 1996–97 are as follows:

Timeliness

(a) 80 per cent. of all planning appeals decided by written representations to be determined in 22 weeks, reducing to 18 weeks by 1998–99;

(b) 80 per cent. of all planning appeals decided by hearings to be determined in 43 weeks, reducing to 24 weeks by 1998–99;

(c) 80 per cent. of all planning appeals decided by inquiries to be determined in 51 weeks, reducing to 36 weeks by 1998–99;

(d) to provide an inspector for local plan inquiries or request within 26 weeks of the end of the objection period and to deliver 90 per cent. of inspectors' reports to local authorities by the dates agreed in service agreements;

Financial

(a) unit costs of planning appeals decided by written representations not to exceed £690;

(b) recover 90 per cent. of receipts due within eight weeks of invoice date;

Efficiency

generate a 3 per cent. efficiency improvement in the use of running costs compared with 1995–96;

Quality

to satisfy the advisory panel on standards, and thus the Secretary of State, annually and following rigorous monitoring, that the quality of the inspectorate's work is being maintained at a high standard with 99 per cent. of its casework free from error;

Information and Guidance

to secure a plain English campaign crystal mark award for 50 per cent. of the Planning Inspectorate's key publications.

The above targets are compared with previous targets and outturns in the Table below:
Planning Inspectorate: targets for England

	Outturn 1993–94	*Outturn 1994–95*	*Outturn 1995–96*	*Proposed 1996–97*	*aims, by 1998–99*
Casework targets					
Determine 80 per cent. of written appeals within 18 weeks	achieved, 17 weeks	missed, 19 weeks	missed, 24 weeks	22 weeks	18 weeks
Determine 80 per cent. of hearing appeals within set time	not set, 25 weeks	not set, 22 weeks	not set, 37 weeks	43 weeks	24 weeks
Determine 80 per cent. of inquiry appeals within set time	not set, 40 weeks	not set, 35 weeks	not set, 41 weeks	51 weeks	36 weeks
Provide an Inspector for Development Plan inquiry within 26 weeks of end of objection period	achieved	achieved	achieved	same	
Deliver 90 per cent. of reports on Development Plans to local authorities by dates agreed in service agreements	not set	not set	not set	new target	
Determine 19,500; 15,500, 14,900 appeals respectively, subject to intake not declining	intake declined; no fault miss	intake declined; no fault miss	intake declined; no fault miss	not set	
Financial targets					
Unit costs of written planning appeals not to exceed £690	achieved, £683	achieved, £689	achieved, £673	same	
Recover 90 per cent. of receipts written eight weeks of invoice	achieved	achieved	achieved	same	
Generate a 3 per cent. efficiency improvement in use of running costs compared with previous year	achieved	achieved	achieved	same	
Quality of casework targets					
The number of justified complaints about the way Inspectors have carried out their duties to be below 1 per cent. of decisions issuedmissed 1.3 per cent.	missed 1.1 per cent.	missed 1.5 per cent.	new target		
Information and guidance targets					
Carry out set tasks to improve information about or guidance given to customers	achieved by customer survey	achieved by customer survey	not set	new "Plain English" task	

Offensive Poster Advertising

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to strengthen safeguards against offensive poster advertising. [37755]

Sir Paul Beresford: The display of all outdoor advertisements is subject to the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992. Among other matters, these powers control the location, size and design of posters in relation on amenity and public safety. They do not extend to consideration of whether the subject matter of an advertisement would offend public decency or moral values, since these matters are outside planning control. These factors are separately addressed by a voluntary code of practice supervised by the Advertising Standards Authority, to which all reputable advertisers, including all the major outdoor poster companies, subscribe. There is no evidence to suggest that these arrangements have proved unsatisfactory or that legislative regulation is required.

Towing Caravan Exemption Certificates

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to issue a statement in

conclusion of the review of the touring caravan exemption certificate system which operates under the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960. [39056]

Mr. Clappison: We have today issued a statement announcing the conclusion of the review of the touring caravan exemption certificate system. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Local Government Pension Scheme

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress is being made to take forward his proposals for change initiative for the local government pension scheme; and if he will make a statement. [39055]

Sir Paul Beresford: Earlier in the year, we consulted widely on our proposals for change initiative for the local government pension scheme—LGPS—in England and Wales. There was wide support for our consultation proposals, which we have decided to adopt.

The LGPS will remain a public service pension scheme prescribed in regulations. The scheme's provisions will be streamlined and local authorities will be able to manage more of the scheme for themselves. We intend early in 1997–98 to make and lay before the House regulations giving effect to these changes. Our aim will be to provide easy-to-read regulations in plain English to assist administering authorities and employers in the operation of the scheme and, in particular, to help scheme members to understand better the benefits available to them. We shall be consulting the local authority associations and other interested parties on drafts of the regulations, which we intend to bring into force on 1 April 1998. This will allow adequate time for all the necessary administrative and other changes to be put in place and ensure a smooth implementation of the new scheme provisions.

I believe these measures will be welcomed by local government employers and employees alike and will provide a satisfactory and secure long-term basis for the LGPS.

Metropolitan Authorities

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the size of the electorate, and the name of *(a)* the largest and *(b)* the smallest of the three member wards in each of the metropolitan authorities in England; and which is the party of the councillors in each of these wards. [38753]

Sir Paul Beresford: All wards in metropolitan authorities in England are three-member wards. The table shows, for each authority, the name and size of electorate of the largest and the smallest ward. Electorate numbers are based on 1995 electoral registers.

	Largest		*Smallest*	
District	*Ward*	*Population*	*Ward*	*Population*
Greater Manchester				
Bolton	Deane-cum-Heaton	13,082	Central	7,608
Bury	Ramsbottom	11,028	Unsworth	7,667
Manchester (City)	Longsight	11,876	Hulme	5,468
Oldham	Saddleworth East	9,948	St. James	5,742
Rochdale	Norden and Bamford	9,400	Middleton West	5,277
Salford	Walkden South	11,390	Ordsall	5,473
Stockport	East Bramhall	12,768	Brinnington	7,692
Tameside	Audenshaw	10,140	Ashton St. Peters	7,688
Trafford	Mersey St. Mary's	9,564	Park	6,025
Wigan	Winstanley	11,863	Norley	7,541
Merseyside				
Knowsley	Roby	6,719	Cantril Farm	3,984
Liverpool	Warbreck	14,223	Everton	4,544
St. Helens	Binge and Seneley Green	10,570	Marshalls Cross	5,959
Sefton	Park	11,618	Netherton	7,543
Wirral	Clatterbridge	13,974	Bidston	8,446
South Yorkshire				
Barnsley	Darton	10,400	Wombwell North	5,173
Doncaster	Armthorpe	13,233	Intake	8,396
Rotherham	Bramley, Ravenfield and Wickersley	13,617	Central	6,289
Sheffield	Mosborough	25,069	Manor	9,134
Tyne and Wear				
Gateshead	Wickham South	8,855	Bensham	5,106
Newcastle upon Tyne	Dene	10,759	Scotswood	5,414
North Tyneside	Weetslade	7,842	Longbenton	5,892
South Tyneside	Cleadon and East Boldon	7,387	Tyne Dock and Simon Side	4,772
Sunderland	Washington South	14,171	Southwick	7,379
West Midlands				
Birmingham	Sutton Four Oaks	24,484	Kingsbury	13,223
Coventry	Woodlands	14,356	Westwood	11,108

District	Largest Ward	Population	Smallest Ward	Population
Dudley	Amblecote	14,309	Netherton and Woodside	7,201
Sandwell	Tipton Green	11,146	St. Paul's	8,147
Solihull	Shirley South	13,510	Kingshurst	6,227
Walsall	Bloxwich West	11,424	Pheasey	7,393
Wolverhampton	Bilston North	10,991	Heath Town	8,123
West Yorkshire				
Bradford	Odsal	12,790	Keighley South	9,816
Calderdale	Greetland and Stainland	9,056	Illingworth	7,429
Kirklees	Birstall and Birkenshaw	13,931	Deighton	10,067
Leeds	Morley South	20,691	Hunslet	11,086
Wakefield	Stanley and Altofts	13,773	Castleford Whitwood	9,776

The Department does not keep records of party political affiliations.

Office of Water Services

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of Water Services publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary; [37876]

(2) if the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of Water Services are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* provisions for open government and *(e)* performance indicators; and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter; [37877]

(3) what is the statutory basis of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of Water Services; if they *(a)* admit members of the public to all board or committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [37880]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The 10 customer service committees—CSCs—of the Office of Water Services are statutory bodies, independent of the water industry, established and maintained by the Director General of Water Services under section 28 of the Water Industry Act 1991. CSCs fall outside the remit of the Parliamentary Commissioner and the Audit Commission, but are subject to scrutiny by the National Audit Office. CSCs have the status of executive non-departmental public bodies but are administratively integrated with Ofwat. They operate to performance standards agreed with the director general and apply the same provisions for open government and the citizen's charter as does Ofwat itself.

Meetings of the CSCs are held in public in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. Further details of the practices followed by the CSCs in undertaking their business are contained in the annual reports of Ofwat and the CSCs, copies of which are in the Library.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if the Ofwat national customer council *(a)* holds public meetings, *(b)* conducts public consultation exercises, *(c)* conducts consultation exercises with outside interests, *(d)* publishes a register of members' interests, *(e)* publishes agendas for meetings and *(f)* publishes the minutes of meetings; and if in each case this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary; [37909]

(2) what is the statutory base of the Ofwat national customer council; if it *(a)* publishes its advice, *(b)* publishes an annual report and *(c)* lays an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [37910]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The Ofwat national customer council is a non-statutory body, independent of the water industry, established by the Director General of Water Services. The manner in which it conducts its business is a matter for the council, and is described in its annual report, a copy of which is in the Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Tied House System

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make representations to the European Commission about the benefits to customers, tenants and independent brewers of the tied house system. [37551]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The block exemption which deals with the tie between brewer and landlord will first be considered as part of a wider debate on the treatment of distribution agreements under EC competition law. The Commission will publish a Green Paper on this issue later this year. Consideration of specific types of agreement such as the tie will follow on from this Green Paper. At that stage, I will be making representations to the European Commission on the tie.

To that end, I am inviting those involved in the beer industry to provide me with their views on the future of this important regulation.

Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the number, nature and total value of contracts awarded by his Department to

(a) Coopers and Lybrand, *(b)* KMPG, *(c)* Price Waterhouse, *(d)* Ernst and Young, *(e)* Deloitte and Touche, *(f)* Arthur Andersen, *(g)* Grant Thornton, *(h)* BDO, *(i)* Stoy Hayward, *(j)* Pannel Kerr Forster and *(k)* Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates during 1995 and 1996. [37336]

Mr. Lang: Only data on external consultancy contracts are held centrally and the following information for the companies in question is available:

Company	*Number of contracts in 1995*
Coopers and Lybrand	1
KMPG	4
Price Waterhouse	0
Ernst and Young	4
Deloitte and Touche	3
Arthur Andersen	0
Grant Thornton	0
BDO	0
Stoy Hayward	2
Pannel Kerr Forster	2
Robson Rhodes	0

The total value of the contracts was £3,613,000.

Company	*Number of contracts in 1996*
KPMG	1
Ernst and Young	1

The total value of the contracts is £104,000.

Commercial sensitivity prevents the disclosure of individual contract details. Information on other contracts can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The information does not include contracts let by the Department's executive agencies, and I have asked the chief executives to reply separately to this question.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 22 July 1996:

I am replying for the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade about contracts placed with various named consultants.

The Patent Office has used two companies listed. In 1996 KPMG were given a single contract valued at £5000 for training advice on job search workshops. In the years 1995 and 1996, Coopers and Lybrand have been used for two contracts. The first addressed the contractorisation of our London Front Office and was completed this year. The total cost of this contract amounted to £55,700 of which £30,000 related to 1995 and £27,500 to 1996. The second was for advice on the possible contractorisation of IT services and has totalled £58,000 so far in 1996.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 22 July 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency to your Parliamentary Question about the Agency's use of various firms.

2 In 1995 the Agency contracted with the following subsidiaries of Deloitte and Touche:

CSL Managed Services Ltd for the provision of accountancy and financial services valued at between £800-£1m ex-VAT over a period of five years; and

Touche Ross Management Consultants for a study into the development of channel communication quality limits valued at £56.5k ex-VAT.

Letter from John S. Holden to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 22 July 1996:

You recently asked the President of the Board of Trade for information about contracts awarded to various organisations. I am replying as Chief Executive of Companies House Executive Agency.

No contracts were awarded by Companies House to any of the firms listed in 1995 or 1996.

Letter from Zélie Armstrong to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 22 July 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your questions about the number, nature and value of contracts awarded to those companies listed for the years 1995 and 1996.

This Agency has not awarded a contract to any of the companies listed in your question.

Letter from Desmond Flynn to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 22 July 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked Peter Joyce, The Insolvency Service Agency Chief Executive, to reply to your question about expenditure on external consultants and the number, nature and total of contracts awarded to named firms in 1995 and 1996 by The Insolvency Service. I am replying in Mr. Joyce's absence on leave.

Details of contracts awarded to the named firms are:

Firms	*Purpose*	*Value of contract (including VAT) 1994–95*	*1995–96*
Coopers and Lybrand	Accountancy support	£60,000	—
Price Waterhouse	User survey	£124,800	—
Ernst and Young	Accountancy support	£13,100	—
CSL (subsidiary of Deloitte and Touche)	Contracted out accounting services	—	£88,812
Stoy Hayward	Contracting out and management consultancy	£94,150	—
	Total	£292,050	£88,812

The £60,000 payment to Coopers and Lybrand for accountancy support for the Agency was in and about the setting up of systems to enable it to produce commercial style accounts. The £13,100 paid to Ernst and Young for accountancy support was to provide independent professional assurance that financial data had been properly transferred to The Service's new computer system for its Central Accounting Unit.

The contract with CSL is for 5 years from 1 April 1995. The £88,812 paid in 1995–96 is for services provided in the year. The costs of the services are largely volume related.

Advanced Gas-cooled Reactors

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) when the Government were notified that Hinckley Point B and Hunterston B were to be shut down on 10 July; [37833]

(2) what discussion *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* civil servants had with British Energy prior to the announcement of the shutdowns of Hinckley Point B and Hunterston B regarding (i) the timing of the closure and (ii) of the announcement; [37832]

(3) when the problems at Hinckley Point B and Hunterston B leading to the shutdown on 10 July first came to the attention of *(a)* British Energy and *(b)* his Department; what assessment was made of the impact of these problems on the flotation of British Energy; and if he will make a statement. [37834]

Mr. Lang: I have nothing to add to the statement that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy made to the House on 16 July, *Official Report*, columns 1013–22.

Labour Unit Costs

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of relative labour unit costs for each European Union country, the United States of America and Japan; and if he will make a statement. [38612]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The most comprehensive data which I have available is drawn from the Bank for International Settlements, and is shown on the table.

Country	*Manufacturing Unit Labour Costs in October 1993*
United States of America	100.0
Japan	165.9
France	142.2
Germany	171.2
Italy	107.4
United Kingdom	126.3
Belgium	125.2
Netherlands	129.1
Sweden	106.0

Notes:
Figures rebased so that USA=100. Figures above 100 show higher unit labour costs than the USA, e.g. Japan's unit labour costs are 65.9 per cent. higher than the US in October 1993.
Source:
'Measuring International Price and Cost Competitiveness' Turner and Van 't Dack. Bank for International Settlements, Economic Papers No. 39, November 1993.

The figures show that the UK's unit labour costs are relatively low. It is important that we maintain this good position. Companies and their employees have the crucial role of ensuring that we remain competitive.

Advertising Standards Authority

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will introduce legislation to replace the Advertising Standards Authority with a statutory body. [37754]

Mr. John M. Taylor: No. The Advertising Standards Authority was established to supervise the advertising code of practice. Self-regulation backed by the Control of Misleading Advertisements Regulations 1988 works well and is the most effective way to protect consumers against misleading and offensive advertising.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what procedures are available to people who wish to make complaints about decisions made by the Advertising Standards Authority. [37783]

Mr. Taylor: Anyone who wants to complain about a decision made by the Advertising Standards Authority can apply in the first instance to the independent chairman, Lord Rodgers of Quarry Bank, for a review of that decision. They can also refer their complaint to the Director General of Fair Trading.

Government Policy

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to promote Government policy in relation to industry. [36808]

Mr. Eggar: DTI Ministers seize every opportunity to further Government policy in relation to industry, to promote the interests of British business and to promote the UK as a location for business investment. Recently, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has set out our policies in relation to industry in a series of keynote speeches, including one in June to the Engineering Employers Federation on the subject of setting enterprise free.

Briefly, the essence of our policy is to promote free enterprises and free trade, with vigourous competition as the driving force.

At home, we adopt a rigorous approach to competition policy, and continue to drive forward the deregulation process. The Department has repealed or amended over 50 pieces of burdensome legislation in the last year alone.

In Europe and beyond, we promote an open trading environment. We have launched a reinvigorated unit—action single market—charged with overcoming illegal barriers and unfair subsidies encountered by British firms in the single market. We are continuing to work with our European partners and in the World Trade Organisation to further the process of multilateral trade liberalisation.

As a result of our commitment to free enterprise, we have seen another record year for inward investment, with over 48,000 new jobs expected to be created as a direct result of investments notified to the Invest in Britain Bureau in 1995–96.

Manufacturing Investment

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what policies the Government have put in place to improve investment in United Kingdom manufacturing. [36797]

Mr. John M. Taylor: We are providing a stable economic environment with low inflation, low corporation tax rates, historically low interst rates and profits are high. The Treasury summer forecast expects that business investment—which includes manufacturing investment—will rise by over 7 per cent. both this year and next.

Fuel Consumers

Sir Robert Hicks: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy that fuel consumers who use pre-payment meters are not required to pay a surcharge on standing or unit prices. [38043]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Subject to their licence obligations to avoid undue discrimination, this is a matter for the public electricity suppliers and gas suppliers. I understand that they have been able to demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the regulators, that there are additional costs involved in operating pre-payment meter systems for electricity and gas customers.

Statistical Forms

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the forms his Department issues annually to businesses to gather statistics, indicating the number of each distributed. [37812]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 19 July 1996]:* A list of regular surveys which gather statistics from business, together with the number of questionnaires distributed, is shown in the following table.

Name of Survey, by Periodicity	*Number of forms per year*
Annual and Quarterly	
Inquiry into Electricity Generated [1]	799
Annual	
Renewable Energy Statistics (RESTATS)	255
Landfill Gas Monitoring	49
Census of Hospital-treated Firework Injuries	442
Quarterly	
Fuels Inquiry [1]	1,200
Inquiry into Oil and Natural Gas [1]	900
Monthly	
Price of Fuel for PPI	672
Biennial	
IT Security Breaches Survey [1]	10,125[2]

[1] A mixed survey of both business and local authorities.
[2] Number of forms every other year.
[3] Surveys conducted for DTI by ONS.

The table is based on records of regular statistical surveys going to 25 or more businesses only. Information on surveys with smaller samples is excluded. In addition, 34 ad hoc surveys were conducted during 1995, some of which collected statistical information.

Trade and Human Rights

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his policy towards discussion of the linkage between world trade and human rights in developing countries at the World Trade Organisation. [36784]

Mr. Nelson: The UK Government are firmly opposed to abuses of fundamental human rights such as forced labour and the exploitation of child labour, wherever this occurs. But we believe that these should be tackled within the appropriate UN framework, which is the International Labour Organisation, and not by the World Trade Organisation.

Terrorist Damage

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) of 27 June, *Official Report, column* 202 , what additional steps he will take to ensure that equivalent assistance in respect of terrorist damage is made available on the British mainland. [38263]

Mr. Nelson: The situation in Northern Ireland is not comparable with that in Great Britain. Compensation schemes operate in the Province because insurance cover against losses arising from terrorist activity is not available. As such cover is fully available on the British mainland in relation to industrial and commercial property, the question of equivalent assistance in respect of terrorist damage does not arise.

Coal Authority

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the annual report and accounts of the Coal Authority will be laid before Parliament. [39009]

Mr. Lang: I have today laid a copy before each House of Parliament.

Brick Industry

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what share of the brick supply industry would be held by *(a)* Ibstock plc, and *(b)* Hanson plc, were the proposed acquisition of Redland Brick plc by Ibstock Buildings Products Ltd. to be allowed to proceed. [38038]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* I am advised by Ibstock that it would have approximately 30 per cent of UK brick manufacturing capacity after the proposed divestment of the plants to which my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade referred in his announcement of 11 July and that it believes Hanson has approximately 31 per cent.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total output and product range of each of the brick plants which it is proposed by the Director General of Fair Trading should be divested under the terms of undertakings to be given by Ibstock Building Products Ltd. in connection with the proposed acquisition of Redland Brick plc by Ibstock Building Products Ltd. [38037]

Mr. Taylor *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The total manufacturing capacity of each of the plants is as follows:

Toddhills: 51

Eldon: 20

South Holmwood: 42

Funton: 11

Chailey: 13

Steerpoint: 40

Million bricks per annum: 177

Each of the plants produces a full range of facing bricks for housing and commercial use. In addition, Chailey produces a range of pavers.

Source:
Ibstock.

Tender Documents

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what tender documents were produced by the Government office for the east midlands in February calling for a strategy for marketing the competitiveness agenda for the east midlands; if he will place copies in the Library; how many companies responded to the request; what framework was used to evaluate the bids; which companies were successful; and if he will make a statement. [38344]

Mr. Page: On 7 February 1996, the Government office for the east midlands, GO-EM, telephoned four local companies, inviting them to provide quotations for a small, short-term contract to help develop a plan for marketing competitiveness in the region. Each company was given the same oral briefing on GO-EM's requirements. Two of them requested—and were granted—meetings to discuss these requirements in more detail.

Three of the companies provided quotations. These were evaluated on the basis of value for money—that is, price and suitability. The contract was awarded to Audax Communications.

I am satisfied that GO-EM's actions in this case were wholly in accordance with the Government's public purchasing policy.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Anti-racist Year

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will now support the European Union proposal to nominate 1997 as an anti-racist year; and if he will make a statement. [38224]

Mr. David Davis: We support the draft resolution designating 1997 as the European Year against Racism. We expect the resolution to be adopted by the Council in the near future.

Bermuda (Asbestos)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Bermudan authorities about disposal of asbestos; what has been his response; and if he will make a statement. [38226]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The Bermudian authorities have asked the United Kingdom on a contingency basis to consider the possibility of disposing of asbestos by landfill in the UK. The Bermudians are also investigating other possible landfill options outside Bermuda. The feasibility of disposal in the UK is being considered as an option.

Royal Visits

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what official visits aborad were made by Prince Michael of Kent in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95; on what dates; at what cost; and which visits were made by use of the Royal Squadron. [38441]

Mr. Rifkind: Prince Michael of Kent made no official visit overseas during this period.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applicants for visit entry clearance during 1995 and 1996 to the latest convenient date were dealt with under the pre-sift procedure at the British post in *(a)* Bombay, *(b)* New Delhi, *(c)* Islamabad, *(d)* Dhaka, *(e)* Manila, *(f)* Moscow, *(g)* Kingston and *(h)* in total; how many people at each post were (i) informed they could proceed to make application, (ii) informed they should not proceed with the application and (iii) asked to produce more documents; how many people in (ii) and (iii) proceeded with the application; and how many of them were (1) granted and (2) refused entry clearance. [38427]

Mr. Hanley: The following are the figures for entry clearance applicants dealt with under the pre-sift procedure during 1995:

	Number
Bombay	4,260
New Delhi	6,101
Islamabad	13,717
Dhaka	419
Manila	209
Moscow	0
Kingston	1,254

The information required to answer the remainder of this question is not readily available and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Western Sahara

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons his representative at the United Nations Securities Council voted in May to suspend the MINURSO votes registration project in Western Sahara; and if he will make a statement. [37724]

Mr. Hanley: We, and other members of the Friends of the Secretary General on the Western Sahara, agreed with the UN Secretary-General's recommendations temporarily to suspend the voter registration process in view of the lack of progress.

We continue to urge Morocco and Polisario to co-operate with the UN and its operation in the territory, MINURSO, so that voter registration can proceed and lead to a referendum on self-determination.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the suitability of the United Nations voter registration project in Western Sahara for creating the conditions for a fair referendum on the future of Western Sahara. [37726]

Mr. Hanley: We believe that the UN operation in the Western Sahara, MINURSO, has developed strict criteria which should result in only those being eligible to vote being included in the electoral register for the referendum.

We urge both parties to put their trust in the process and co-operate with the UN Secretary-General and MINURSO so that voter registration can be resumed.

We continue to believe that a referendum of self-determination represents the best solution to the conflict in the Western Sahara.

Equal Rights

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the provisions in the Euro Mediterranean Association agreement in respect of the equal rights of all peoples to self-determination; and if he will list the states which are signatories to the treaty. [37725]

Mr. David Davis: The Euro-Mediterranean Association agreements, so far concluded with Tunisia, Morocco and Israel, state that respect for human rights and democratic principles constitute an essential element of the agreement. The principle of self-determination is not specifically mentioned in the association agreements, but in the declaration which was adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean conference at Barcelona in November 1995, 15 EU member states and the 12 Mediterranean partners undertake

"to respect the equal rights of peoples and their right to self-determination, acting at all times in conformity with the purposes and principles of the Charter to the United Nations and with the relevant norms on international law, including those relating to territorial integrity of States, as reflected in agreements between relevant parties".

Indonesia

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government have recently made to the Government of Indonesia concerning human rights abuses; and if he will make a statement. [38199]

Mr. Hanley: We regularly raise our concerns about human rights with the Indonesian Government. Most recently I discussed human rights on 15 July in Jakarta with the Indonesian Foreign Minister and others.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what visits have been made by (i) Her Majesty's ambassador to Indonesia and (ii) embassy staff to East Timor; and what reports have been made available to him concerning East Timor. [38115]

Mr. Hanley: Since 1994 British embassy staff in Jakarta have visited East Timor three times: twice in 1995 and once in 1996. On the most recent visit the FCO desk officer accompanied. Her Majesty's ambassador to Indonesia has not visited East Timor. We have received numerous reports concerning East Timor, including from non-governmental organisations and other Governments, in addition to those from our embassy in Jakarta.

Antarctic Treaty

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to reach agreement with other signatory nations on the location of the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat; and if he will make a statement. [38198]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The United Kingdom is keen to see this issue resolved, but the Antarctic treaty consultative parties have yet to reach an agreement by consensus on the location of the Antarctic treaty secretariat.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Japan concerning their policy in respect of the Antarctic treaty; and if he will make a statement. [38102]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: At the recent annual meeting of the Antarctic treaty consultative parties in Utrecht, the United Kingdom urged Japan and the other three states that have not yet ratified the environmental protocol to do so at the earliest opportunity. Officials have also been in correspondence with their Japanese counterparts on a range of detailed technical issues relating to the protocol.

Nicaragua

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to assist independent monitoring of the forthcoming elections in Nicaragua; and if he will make a statement. [38103]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The EU will send a team of observers to monitor the Nicaraguan elections in November. Dr. David Browning will be the UK observer assisted by the staff at the embassy in Managua.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what instructions he has issued to British posts overseas regarding *(a)* the acceptance and recording of applications for political asylum, *(b)* the consideration of such applications, *(c)* the granting of such applications, *(d)* the refusal of such applications, *(e)* the right of appeal against refusal to grant asylum; if exceptional applications are considered at posts from women claiming they are victims of or threatened with forcible abortions or sterilisation; and if he will make a statement. [38582]

Mr. Hanley: Entry clearance officers at British posts overseas are guided by the following advice on asylum matters:

In accordance with the 1951 Geneva convention and the 1967 New York protocol on the status of refugees the United Kingdom is under no obligation to accept a request for asylum overseas. Entry clearance officers have discretion, however, to accept outside the immigration rules an application for entry clearance for the United Kingdom where a foreign national demonstrates his circumstances meet the definition of the 1951 convention, he has particularly close ties with the United Kingdom and this is the most appropriate country of long-term refuge. Any such application is to be referred to the Home Office for decision.

Rahmana Bibi

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a decision is to be taken on the application to the British post in Islamabad by Rahmana Bibi, Ref. D3059 to join her husband in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [38580]

Mr. Hanley: I have asked the high commission at Islamabad for details and will arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply from the migration and visa correspondence unit as soon as possible.

Falkland Islands Company

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what subsidies Her Majesty's Government pay to *(a)* the Falkland Islands Company *(b)* its subsidiary and *(c)* related companies; what was the value of these subsidies in each of the last five years; to what use they were put; and if he will make a statement. [38783]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: HMG have paid no subsidies to the Falkland Islands Company or any subsidiary or related companies in the last five years.

"A Partnership of Nations"

Sir Peter Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to table United Kingdom Government proposals for the European Union intergovernmental conference foreshadowed in "A Partnership of Nations". [39236]

Mr. David Davis: The United Kingdom negotiators are today tabling the following proposals in the IGC working party.

(a) a memorandum on the European Court of Justice working up in detail the proposals outlined in paragraph 37 of "A Partnership of Nations";

(b) the addition of a protocol to the EC treaty enabling member states to take appropriate action to regulate quota-hopping in the common fisheries policy. The details of this are set out more fully in a written answer to today's date from my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry).

(c) a package of measures to improve the quality of EC legislation, including Commission legislation;

(d) an amendment to article 42 of the EC treaty to provide for the state aid provisions of the treaty to apply to all agricultural products;

(e) an amendment to article 129c of the EC treaty to make clear that private sector projects are eligible for Community budget support under the financial regulation on trans-European networks;

(f) the addition of a protocol to the EC treaty which will place a formal legal obligation on Community institutions to give full regard to considerations of animal welfare in the exercise of their powers on agriculture, transport, research and the single market.

These proposals were placed on the House Libraries this morning.

The Government are currently working up a number of other proposals including on the health and safety article and on subsidiarity which will be tabled in due course.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for entry clearance in order to seek asylum in the United Kingdom were *(a)* received and *(b)* granted by country during 1995 and the first quarter of 1996. [38070]

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of days asylum seekers have been held in custody in 1995–96; and at what aggregate cost. [38105]

Mr. Kirhope: This information is not available.

Immigration

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for entry clearance from *(a)* wives, *(b)* husbands, *(c)* fiancés, *(d)* fianceés made at British posts in (1) New Delhi, (2) Bombay, (3) Calcutta, (4) Madras, (5) Dhaka, (6) Islmabad, (7) Karachi, (8) Colombo, (9) Accra, (10) Lagos, (11) Manila, (12) Bangkok, (13) Washington and (14) Ottawa for *(y)* each quarter since January 1995, and *(z)* in total, were *(a)* received, *(b)* granted and *(c)* refused; how many refusals at each post were (i) wholly and (ii) partly because the visa officer was not satisfied that the primary purpose of the marriage was not immigration; how many refusals at each post were (i) wholly and (ii) partly because the visa officer was not satisfied that the couple could support and accommodate themselves without recourse to public funds; what was the refusal rate at each post; and what percentage of those refusals were *(x)* wholly and *(y)* partly on primary purpose grounds. [38074]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information for the Indian sub-continent for each quarter of 1995 and the first quarter of 1996 is given in the tables. As they are lengthy, copies of these have been placed in the Library. Where numbers are small, figures for individual posts have been combined. Information on reasons for refusals is not complied for periods shorter than 12 months. Corresponding information for Colombo, Accra, Lagos, Manila, Bangkok, Washington and Ottawa is not available centrally.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were waiting for special quota vouchers in *(a)* India, *(b)*east Africa and (c) the rest of the world in (i) June 1995, (ii) December 1995 and (iii) June 1996; when those issued with vouchers on those dates had applied; how many vouchers were issued in (1) India, (2) east Africa and (3) the rest of the world in (A) 1995 and (B) the first half of 1996; when those applying now can expect to receive vouchers; and how many applicants there were for vouchers in *(v)* India and *(w)* east Africa and *(x)* the rest of the world in *(y)* 1995 and *(z)* the first half of 1996. [38078]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information is given in the tables.

Persons applying for a special voucher of entry to the United Kingdom, 1995 and 1996

Persons

	Applications newly received[1]			Vouchers issued			Applications awaiting a decision at the end of:		
	1995	Q1 1996	Q2 1996	1995	Q1 1996	Q2 1996	Q2 1995	Q4 1995	Q2 1996
India	290	80	50	180	50	50	90	120	140
Kenya	130	n/a	n/a	120	n/a	n/a	120	90	n/a
Tanzania	20	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	10	[2]—	40	40	30
Malawi	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	nil	nil	[2]—	[2]—
Zambia	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Rest of the world	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	n/a	[2]—	[2]—	n/a

[1] Includes applications subsequently withdrawn or lapsed. [2] 5 or fewer.
n/a = Data not available.

Waiting times for persons applying for a special voucher, 1995 and 1996

Months

	Waiting times to first interview for persons at end of:		Persons applying at end of:
	June 1995	December 1995	June 1996
India	Nil	Nil	Nil
Kenya	1.00	0.25	n/a
Tanzania	1.5	1.00	1.00
Malawi	0.25	0.25	0.25
Zambia	n/a	n/a	n/a
Rest of the World	n/a	n/a	n/a

n/a = Not available

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time taken by his Department to investigate cases referred from overseas posts in order to assess whether the maintenance and accommodation requirements of the immigration rules have been met. [38066]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate as to how many applications for *(a)* adult registration with entitlement,*(b)* naturalisation and *(c)* registration of minors his Department (i) will receive and (ii) expects to grant in 1996–97. [38072]

Mr. Kirkhope: The latest estimate of the number of citizenship applications likely to be received and granted in 1996–97 is as follows:

	Intake	Applications granted
Adult registration	3,800	3,300
Naturalisation	40,500	32,200
Minor registration	11,000	10,400
Total	55,300	45,900

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many operations against people alleged to be in the United Kingdom illegally, involving both immigration officers and police, took place during 1995 and 1996 to the latest convenient date; and for each operation by date and by name, how many *(a)* immigration officers and *(b)* police officers were involved, how many people were arrested and found to be (i) legally in the United Kingdom, (ii) in breach of immigration conditions, (iii) alleged illegal entrants and (iv) British citizens; how many requested and were granted legal advice before interview; how many were detained for *(x)* one day or less, *(y)* between a day and a week and *(z)* over a week; and how many have subsequently left the United Kingdom. [38060]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for *(a)* single entry and *(b)* multiple entry visit visas were (i) received, (ii) granted and (iii) refused at each post in the Indian sub-continent, Ghana, Nigeria, the Philippines and Jamaica in each quarter of 1995 and the first quarters of 1996; and what was the delay between application and interview for those whose applications were felt to need a second or long interview at each of those posts in (i) June 1995, (ii) January 1996 and (iii) June 1996 or the nearest available date. [38069]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I would refer the hon. Member to my answer to his question on 9 January, *Official Report*, columns *191–92*.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* husbands, *(b)* wives and *(c)* dependent children have been refused (i) extension of stay and (ii) settlement in the United Kingdom on the grounds that he is not satisfied that they can be maintained and accommodated without recourse to public funds, in each quarter since January 1995, and in total. [38083]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information relating to after entry cases is given in the table. Information on dependent children is not readily available.

Refusals[1] on grounds of maintenance and accommodation, of after-entry applications by husbands and wives (numbers of persons)

	Refusals to grant probationary year on grounds of:			
	Accommodation	Maintenance	Maintenance and accommodation	Refusals of settlement after probationary year[2]
1995				
Quarter 1				
Husbands	—	2	—	10
Wives	—	2	—	5

Refusals[1] on grounds of maintenance and accommodation, of after-entry applications by husbands and wives (numbers of persons)

	Refusals to grant probationary year on grounds of:			
	Accommodation	*Maintenance*	*Maintenance and accommodation*	*Refusals of settlement after probationary year[2]*
Quarter 2				
Husbands	—	—	—	2
Wives	—	2	2	2
Quarter 3				
Husbands	1	—	—	6
Wives	2	1	2	5
Quarter 4				
Husbands	1	1	2	6
Wives	1	2	4	3
1996				
Quarter 1				
Husbands	—	—	—	3
Wives	—	1	2	2
Quarter 2				
Husbands	—	—	—	6
Wives	—	1	—	1
Total				
Husbands	2	3	2	33
Wives	3	9	10	18

[1] Excluding dependants. [2] Refusals of settlement after probationary year on general considerations, including recourse to public funds.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people during 1995 and the first quarter of 1996 were *(a)* required to undergo a medical examination and *(b)* refused entry clearance abroad and in which countries, for (i) settlement and (ii) other purposes on medical grounds; and what are the most common medical grounds for refusal. [38061]

Mr. Kirkhope: This information is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for settlement by wives and children in *(a)* Dhaka and *(b)* Islamabad were (i) received, (ii) granted, (iii) refused, (iv) deferred at first interview, (v) lapsed and (vi) outstanding and awaiting first interview for each quarter since the beginning of 1995. [38071]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information is given in the table.

Applications for entry clearance for settlement made by wives and children in Dhaka and Islamabad, 1995 to 1996

	1995					*1996*
	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	*Year*	*Q1*
Applications newly received[1]						
Dhaka	540	750	580	500	2,370	440
Islamabad	1,080	960	900	900	3,840	1,110
Applications granted[2]						
Dhaka	330	360	370	460	1,510	320
Islamabad	590	770	620	540	2,530	820
Applications refused initially						
Dhaka	260	310	410	340	1,320	250
Islamabad	280	250	320	320	1,170	420
Applications withdrawn or lapsed						
Dhaka	[4]—	[4]—	10	[4]—	20	20
Islamabad	50	100	80	60	290	70
Applications outstanding at end of period						
Dhaka	2,190	2,320	2,160	1,880	1,880	1,760
Islamabad	2,830	2,810	2,800	2,870	2,870	2,790
Applicants awaiting first interview at end of period						
Dhaka[3]	30	20	nil	nil	nil	nil
Islamabad	970	1,290	1,440	1,280	1,280	1,340

[1] Including applications subsequently withdrawn or lapsed.

[2] Granted initially or on appeal.

[3] In Dhaka the majority of applications are resolved without interview.

[4] Five or fewer.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many outstanding immigration applications there are at Lunar house from *(a)* students, *(b)* family members in the United Kingdom applying for variation of stay, *(c)* settlement entry clearance applications referred from overseas post and *(d)* asylum seekers; and what are the average times applicants in each category might expect to wait before a decision. [38067]

Mr. Kirhope: The available information is that at the end of June 1996 there were in total about 21,500 cases in the general immigration and settlement caseworking groups of the after entry and appeals directorate—including referred entry clearance applications—the majority of which were under consideration of the subject of further inquiries, and about 64,700 cases in the asylum directorate caseworking teams.

The estimated average length of time between the receipt of an application and the decision for cases in AEAD caseworking groups, in the second quarter of 1996, was about three months for students. The waiting time for asylum applications is on average about 11 months for post-Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 cases and 45 months for those made before. Information on average waiting times for family members in the United Kingdom for variation of leave and for settlement entry clearance application referred from overseas posts is not available.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for British citizenship under section 4(5) of the British Nationality Act 1981 have been *(a)* made, *(b)* granted and *(c)* refused in each quarter since January 1994; and how many of those granted have been on the grounds of service in the armed forces. [38073]

Mr. Kirkhope: One application was received in each of the months April, September and December 1994, June 1995 and June 1996. Of these, one has been granted, three have been refused and one has not yet been decided. The application which was granted was made on the ground of service in the armed forces.

Detainees (Suicide Attempts)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many suicide attempts there have been since 1994 by people being arrested in the presence of immigration officers. [38200]

Mr. Kirkhope: The hon. Member has corresponded with me about the circumstances in which, on 17 November 1995, one of his constituents who was to be detained for removal as an illegal entrant took up a position on the balcony of his flat and threatened to jump. In the event, he did not do so.

We know of no similar suicide threats since 1994, although comprehensive inquires could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost.

Deportation

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's current policy on enforcing deportation decisions against genuine students who have been found to be working in breach of their conditions of entry; how many deportation decisions have been made on the grounds of working without permission in each quarter since January 1995; what is his definition of a genuine student; and if he will *(a)* list the colleges which he does not recognise as providing courses of study for overseas students acceptable under the immigration rules and *(b)* give the criteria he uses to decide on such colleges. [38068]

Mr. Kirkhope: Any overseas student who wishes to work during his free time or vacation may do so by obtaining permission from the Department for Education and Employment. Each case where a student is found to be working without such permission is considered on its individual merits. As required by the immigration rules, the case for deportation is considered in the light of all known relevant factors. Records are not kept in a form which would enable the number of students made subject to deportation decisions to be identified.

The immigration and nationality directorate collects information which comes to light about individual colleges, and account is taken of this by staff when dealing with applications from students. Staff are made aware of what information is available by means of internal notices which are part of staff instructions and are not published.

Prisons (Self-inflicted Deaths)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many self-inflicted deaths have occurred in each year since 1992 *(a)* in each prison and *(b)* by security category in each prison. [37978]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, Dated 22 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about self-inflicted deaths in prison.

The attached table shows the number of self-inflicted deaths that have occurred each year since 1992 in prisons in England and Wales by security category.

Establishment	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Acklington	—	—	—	1(C)	—
Albany	—	—	1(C)	—	—
Ashwell	2(C, C)	—	—	—	—
Aylesbury	—	—	—	1(U)	—
Bedford	—	—	1(U)	2(U, U)	—
Belmarsh	—	1(A)	—	2(U, U)	—
Birmingham	1(U)	—	1(D)	2(A, U)	1(U)
Blakenhurst	—	—	—	1(C)	—
Blundeston	—	—	—	2(C, B)	—
Brinsford	1(U)	—	1(U)	—	1(U)
Bristol	1(U)	2(U, U)	—	1(C)	1(U)
Brixton	1(U)	1(U)	3(U, B, U)	—	1(U)
Bullingdon	1(U)	—	—	1(U)	1(B)
Canterbury	—	1(U)	—	—	—
Cardiff	—	—	2(U, U)	—	—
Chelmsford	—	—	1(C)	1(U)	—
Dartmoor	—	1(B)	1(C)	—	2(B)
Deerbolt	1(U)	—	—	—	—
Doncaster	—	—	2(U, U)	2(U, U)	1(U)
Dorchester	1(C)	—	—	—	2(U, U)
Dover	—	—	—	1(U)	—
Downview	—	—	—	1(C)	—
Durham	2(U, U)	1(U)	—	—	1(U)
Elmley	1(U)	—	1(U)	—	—
Erlestoke	—	—	—	2(C, C)	—
Exeter	—	4(C, U x3)	1(B)	2(U, B)	—
Feathersione	—	—	—	1(C)	—
Feltham	2(U, U)	—	—	—	1(U)
Frankland	—	—	—	1(B)	—

Establishment	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Full Sutton	—	1(A)	—	1(B)	1(B)
Garth	—	—	1(B)	1(B)	—
Gartree	1(B)	—	1(B)	—	1(B)
Glen Parva	1(U)	—	—	—	1(U)
Gloucester	—	—	—	1(U)	—
Grendon	—	—	2(C, B)	1(B)	—
Haverigg	—	—	—	1(C)	—
Highdown	—	1(U)	1(C)	4(B, C, A, U)	1(C)
Hindley	1(U)	1(U)	—	—	—
Holloway	1(U)	1(U)	—	2(U, U)	—
Holme House	—	2(D, C)	—	—	1(C)
Hull	2(U, U)	1(C)	2(C, U)	1(U)	1(U)
Kirkham	—	—	—	—	1(U)
Leeds	2(U, U)	2(U, U)	1(U)	1(U)	—
Leicester	1(U)	3(U, U, C)	3(U x3)	1(B)	—
Lewes	1(U)	1(U)	—	1(D)	—
Lincoln	—	3(U, C, U)	1(D)	2(C, C)	1(U)
Lindholme	—	1(C)	—	—	1(C)
Littlehey	1(C)	—	—	—	—
Liverpool	1(U)	2(U, U)	5(U x3, B, C)	1(U)	2(U, U)
Long Lartin	1(A)	1(B)	1(B)	1(B)	1(A)
Low Newton	—	—	2(U, U)	2(U, U)	—
Maidstone	1(D)	—	—	—	—
Manchester	—	2(U, U)	2(U, C)	—	4(U x4)
Moorland	—	—	3(U x3)	—	—
New Hall	—	—	1(U)	—	—
Norwich	2(U, C)	2(U, U)	—	4(U x3, B)	—
Nottingham	—	1(B)	—	1(B)	—
Parkhurst	1(C)	1(C)	2(B, B)	—	—
Pentonville	4(U x4)	—	—	2(U, B)	1(U)
Portland	—	—	1(U)	—	1(U)
Preston	—	—	1(U)	1(U)	—
Risley	—	—	1(C)	—	—
Shepton Mallet	—	1(C)	—	—	—
Shrewsbury	—	—	1(U)	—	1(U)
Stafford	1(C)	—	—	—	—
Stocken	—	—	—	—	1(C)
Stoke Heath	—	—	—	1(U)	—
Styal	1(U)	—	—	—	—
Swaleside	1(C)	—	1(U)	—	—
Swansea	—	—	1(U)	1(U)	—
The Mount	—	—	—	1(C)	1(C)
The Verne	—	—	1(C)	—	—
Usk	—	—	1(C)	—	—
Wakefield	1(B)	3(B, B, D)	1(B)	1(B)	—
Wandsworth	—	2(U, B)	4(U x3, D)	—	—
Wellingborough	1(B)	—	—	—	—
Wetherby	—	1(U)	—	—	—
Whatton	—	—	—	1(C)	—
Whitemoor	—	—	—	1(B)	—
Winchester	—	1(U)	1(U)	—	2(B, C)
Wolds	—	1(U)	—	1(U)	1(B)
Woodhill	—	1(U)	1(U)	—	—
Wormwood Scrubs	1(U)	—	4(B.B, U, U)	—	1(U)
P.E.C.S. (Prison Escort Court Custody Service)	—	—	—	—	1(B)

Key to security classification:

A = Category A; B = Category B; C = Category C; D = Category D; U = Unclassified.

N.B. Unclassified refers to the following categories: unsentenced on remand; sentenced but awaiting categorisation; young offender; females non category A.

Prisons (Staffing Levels)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the minimum staffing levels required to ensure that the protection of the public and staff and prisoner safety is maintained at *(a)* all privately operated prisons and *(b)* for the Prison Service operated comparator group prisons; [38181]

(2) if he will list the minimum permitted staffing levels at *(a)* all privately operated prisons for the next financial year and *(b)* for the prison Service operated comparator group prisons for the same period; [38179]

(3) if he will list the lowest and highest staffing levels at *(a)* all privately operated prisons since commencing operation and *(b)* for the Prison Service operated comparator group prisons for the same period; [38177]

(4) if he will list the minimum permitted staffing levels at *(a)* all privately operated prisons and *(b)* for the Prison Service operated comparator group prisons in relation to the number of prisoners held; [38180]

(5) if he will list the average staffing levels at *(a)* all privately operated prisons since commencing operation and *(b)* for the Prison Service operated comparator group prisons for the same period; [38176]

(6) if he will list the minimum permitted staffing levels at *(a)* all privately operated prisons since commencing operation and *(b)* for the Prison Service operated comparator group prisons for the same period. [38178]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 22 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about staffing levels at contracted prisons and their public-service comparators.

Where minimum staffing levels are set by the governor of a Prison Service establishment this is done in consultation with the area manager concerned after consultation with staff. They are set at a level to ensure staff and inmate safety, security and control. Operational requirements will differ depending on a number of factors including the build and function of the prison and the size and mix of the inmate population.

Contracts for the four privately-managed prisons also do not prescribe minimum staffing levels. Staffing levels and the deployment of staff are therefore a matter for the contractor concerned who must meet the standards required by the contract to ensure safety, security and control.

For these reasons, I cannot provide minimum required staffing levels.

Figures for the average, the highest and the lowest staffing levels at prisons are not available in the form requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

London Fire Service

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 8 July, *Official Report*, column *34*, which hon. Members have made representations to him regarding *(a)* proposed changes in the level of London's fire service and *(b)* closure of fire stations. [38159]

Mr. Sackville: A list of the hon. Members referred to in my answer of 8 July, *Official Report*, column *34*, has been placed in the Library.

Departmental Visits (United States)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the dates in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95, *(c)* 1995–96 and *(d)* 1996–97 on

which (i) he, (ii) other Home Office Ministers and (iii) officials visited the United States of America on matters of criminal justice policy; who made each visit; what was the purpose of each visit; with whom meetings were held; what were the outcomes of these meetings on each visit; and what was the cost to public funds of each visit. [37975]

Mr. Howard: During the period in question there have been four ministerial visits to the United States of America on criminal justice matters as follows:

(a) 1 to 8 January 1994: I undertook a visit covering prisons, police, crime prevention and drug trafficking matters;

(b) 24 to 27 April 1995: The former Minister of State, Home Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) accompanied by a private secretary and the Director General of the Prison Service, undertook a visit to high-security prisons;

(c) 12 to 17 November 1995: I undertook a visit, accompanied by a private secretary and the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, covering prison and terrorism matters;

(d) 12 to 15 December 1995: The Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and the Border (Mr. Maclean), accompanied by a private secretary, undertook a visit covering police and terrorism matters.

The other details requested are either unavailable or could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Refugees

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions have taken place in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996 to the latest convenient date with (i) European Union partners, (ii) other countries and (iii) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees about possible alterations to the UN convention relating to the status of refugees; what has been the outcome of these discussions; and if he will make a statement. [38428]

Mr. Kirkhope: No proposals have been advanced for amendment to the 1951 convention.

DNA Tests

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many DNA tests to prove family relationships for immigration purposes have been carried out under the Home Office-funded scheme during *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* the first quarter of 1996, listed by country of origin; what was the average waiting period for the test and for its origin; what was the average waiting period for the test and for its results; and in how many of those tests the family relationships proved to be as claimed by the applicants. [38054]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information is given in the table.

In 1995, the average waiting time from the taking of a blood sample to a decision being made on DNA tests was six to eight weeks.

DNA tests on children under the Government scheme, results received and outcomes, 1995–1996

Number of children

Country/post where application made	*Number of tests carried out*	*Tests offered but not taken*	*Number awaiting results at end of period*	*Number of results received*	*Outcomes Related as claimed to both parents*	*Related as claimed to one parent but not other*	*Not related as claimed to either parent*
1995							
Indian sub-continent	1,617	23	535	1,772	1,509	160	103
Bangladesh (Dhaka)	1,125	19	212	1,270	1,107	88	75
Pakistan (Islamabad, Karachi)	404	—	280	424	332	66	26
India (Bombay, New Delhi, Calcutta, Madras)	88	4	43	78	70	6	2
Outside of Indian sub-continent[1]	202	[1]—	n/a	n/a	n/a	41	
Ethiopia	62	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	31	
Egypt (Cairo)	10	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Ghana (Accra)	16	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	
Guyana (Georgetown)	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	—	
Kenya (Nairobi)	6	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	—	
Nigeria (Lagos)	29	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	
Philippines (Manila)	23	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	
Sierra Leone (Freetown)	32	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	
Sudan (Khartoum)	4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Sweden (Stockholm)	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Thailand (Bangkok)	3	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Turkey (Istanbul)	14	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Yemen (Sana'a)	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	
Q1 1996							
Indian sub-continent	320	1	511	326	286	12	25
Bangladesh (Dhaka)	227	nil	171	268	238	10	17
Pakistan (Islamabad, Karachi)	63	nil	278	50	43	2	5
India (Bombay, New Delhi, Calcutta, Madras)	30	1	62	8	5	nil	3

[1] Refers to the number of tests for which an invoice has been received.

Immigration Rules

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes he plans to make to paragraph 2 of the statement of changes in the immigration rules, HC 395 of Session 1994–95; what consultation he is having with interested organisations; and if he will make a statement. [38432]

Mr. Kirkhope: None.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been (i) granted and (ii) refused (A) entry clearance and (B) leave to enter the United Kingdom in (1) 1994, (2) 1995 and (3) 1996 to the latest convenient date under the provisions of paragraphs 246 and 247 of the consolidated immigration, rules HC 395 of Session 1994–95. [38430]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not collected centrally.

British Citizenship

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many minor children born to a British overseas citizen parent outside the United Kingdom have *(a)* been registered and *(b)* been refused registration as (i) a British citizen and (ii) a British overseas citizen in each year since 1 January 1994. [38075]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information is not available in the form requested. Minor children may apply for registration as British overseas citizens under section 27 of the British Nationality Act 1981. The numbers of grants made under this section, most of which will have been made to minor children born abroad to a British overseas citizen parent, are as follows:

1994: 2

1995: 1

1996: 1 (to date)

Prisons (Assaults)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list (i) the latest available figures, (ii) the figures for 1992, (iii) those for 1988 and (iv) those for 1987 for *(a)* the prisoner-on-prisoner assault rates and *(b)* prisoner-on-staff assault rates, for each category C prison. [38746]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 22 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking for assault rates in each category C prison.

Provisional figures for 1995–96 are shown in the attached table. Statistics for assaults in each Prison Service establishment are published each year in 'Statistics of offences against prison discipline and punishments England and Wales'. The latest edition for 1995 (Cm.3316) and earlier editions are available in the Library.

Assaults per 100 population in category C training prisons 1995–96[1]

Establishment	*Staff/others*	*Prisoners*	*Total*
Acklington	2.2	0.6	2.8
Aldington	—	1.7	1.7
Ashwell	4.4	0.3	4.6
Blantyre House	—	—	—
Brockhill	4.5	3.8	8.3
Buckley Hall	7.3	1.4	8.7
Camp Hill	2.3	4.1	6.4
Channings Wood	0.5	0.5	1.1
Coldingley	4.6	0.7	5.3
Downview	—	—	—
Erlestoke	1.1	0.8	1.9
Everthorpe	1.4	1.0	2.4
Featherstone	3.4	2.2	5.6
Haverigg	1.8	1.3	3.0
Highpoint	3.4	0.8	4.2
Kirklevington	—	—	—
Lancaster	0.9	0.9	1.8
Latchmere House	—	—	—
Lindholme	1.8	1.1	3.0
Littlehey	2.7	1.1	3.8
Moorland	11.3	6.1	17.4
Mount (The)	1.8	1.4	3.2
Ranby	2.0	0.3	2.3
Risley	10.8	6.0	16.8
Send	—	—	—
Shepton Mallet	0.5	4.0	4.5
Stafford	4.1	1.9	6.0
Stocken	4.3	0.5	4.8
Usk	0.8	1.7	2.5
Verne	0.9	0.7	1.7
Wayland	0.9	1.9	2.8
Wealstun	0.2	0.9	1.1
Wellingborough	1.6	—	1.6
Whatton	0.5	2.4	2.8
Wymott	0.5	1.2	1.7
Average	3.0	1.7	4.7

[1] Provisional.

Election Register Sales

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to stop the sale of election registers to commercial organisations; and under what authority such sales are presently authorised. [38259]

Mr. Sackville: None. Under regulation 18(2) of the Representation of the People Regulations 1990, the electoral registration officer appointed by each London borough or district council is required to sell the register upon publication to anyone who has ordered copies before 1 November in the previous year.

Prison (Visiting Entitlement)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the of State for the Home Department if he will list (i) the latest available figures, (ii) the figures for 1992, (iii) those for 1988 and (iv) those for 1987 for the average percentage of prisoners who exceed minimum visiting entitlements for each category C prison. [38750]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 22 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the average percentage of prisoners who exceed the minimum visiting entitlement for each category C prison.

The information is not collected in the form requested. The Prison Service had however a key performance indicator (KPI) which measured the proportion of prisoners held in establishments which gave all prisoners the opportunity to exceed the minimum visiting entitlement, subject to qualifying for this under the earned incentives scheme.

Last year the Prison Service succeeded in meeting this target in every establishment, for the second year running. In view of this achievement, Ministers agreed that this KPI should be dropped and replaced by other more challenging ones.

Performance on this KPI since the beginning of agency status is shown in the attached table.

Prison service key performance indicator—minimum visiting entitlement, 1992–1996

	Performance of population with opportunity to exceed the minimum visiting entitlement
1992–93	84
1993–94	99
1994–95	100
1995–96	100

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many parliamentary questions to his Department have been referred for answer to non-departmental public bodies for which he has responsibility, in each the last six parliamentary Sessions, and so far in the 1995–96 Session; and if he will make a statement. [38699]

Mr. Howard: No parliamentary questions have been referred for answer to non-departmental public bodies for which I have responsibility in each of the last six parliamentary Sessions or so far in the 1995–96 Session.

High-intensity Training Programme

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when preparations for the high-intensity training programme at Her Majesty's young offenders institution Thorn Cross will be completed; and what target has been set for *(a)* the selection and *(b)* the reception of the first group of offenders; [38045]

(2) if it is his policy *(a)* that the high-intensity training programme, as well as being physically demanding, will focus on the education and social requirements of the inmates and *(b)* for intensive support to be provided to offenders on release from the high-intensity training programme; [38046]

(3) if he will outline the procedures by which the high-intensity training programme will aim to reduce recidivism; and how the success or failure will be monitored *(a)* in general and *(b)* in individual cases; [38047]

(4) what were the results of research carried out by members of the Prison Service senior management programme on boot camps in America; and how the schemes for the high-intensity training programme at Her Majesty's young offenders institution Thorn Cross will differ from schemes run in the USA. [38049]

Miss Widdecombe: The high-intensity training programme at Thorn Cross young offender institution receives its first intake of young offenders today.

As well as being physically and mentally demanding, the programme aims to address the educational and social needs of the inmates. The level of supervision after release will be higher than that experienced by inmates who serve their sentence in a normal young offender institution.

High-intensity training aims to reduce recidivism by combining:

- a demanding and disciplined approach;
- effective activities designed to bring about positive behavioural change;
- education and skills training;
- help into employment and good after release support.

Changes in the attitudes and behaviour of young offenders during their time at Thorn Cross will be assessed and re-convictions after release will be monitored. The results will be compared with those from a control group of similar young offenders who experience conventional young offender institution regimes.

Members of the 1993 Prison Service senior management programme, a training course for newly promoted senior staff, visited an American boot camp and other establishments as part of their training. An article by three of them was published in the May 1995 issue of the "Prison Service Journal", a copy of which has been placed in the Library. It represents the views of the writers and was not commissioned as a piece of research by or for the Prison Service or the Home Office.

American boot camps vary considerably in terms of their regimes and performance. High-intensity training is not a copy of an American boot camp but combines positive elements to be found in prison regimes both in America and in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the Army to be involved in running high-intensity regimes for civilian offenders *(a)* at the military corrective training centre, Colchester, and *(b)* elsewhere. [38048]

Miss Widdecombe: I announced our plans for a new young offender institution at Colchester in answer to a question from the hon. Member for Welwyn and Hatfield (Mr. Evans) on 17 April *Official Report*, column *511*. There are currently no plans for similar initiatives involving the Army.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Pupil Level Data

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will amend the Education (National Curriculum) (Assessment Arrangements for the Core Subjects) Order 1995 to require external marking agencies to provide pupil level data to local education authorities when requested to do so. [38258]

Mr. Paice: It would not be possible to amend the Education (National Curriculum) (Assessment Arrangements for the Core Subjects) Orders in this way. The powers under which the orders are made would not extend to such an amendment.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average pupil-teacher ratio of *(a)* schools providing education under the assisted places scheme and *(b)* of comparable state schools. [38431]

Mrs. Gillan: Separate information for schools participating in the assisted places scheme is not readily available, nor is it possible to identify a set of maintained schools comparable in all relevant aspects with those within the scheme. Pupil-teacher ratios for different types

of schools were published in statistical press notice 205/96 on 25 June. A copy of the press notice is available in the Library.

Free School Meals

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the percentage of pupils *(a)* taking and *(b)* entitled to free school meals in (i) grant-maintained and (ii) local education authority-maintained schools. [38023]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is shown in the table:

Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in England[1] : January 1996 (provisional)

	Primary	*Secondary*	*All[2]*
LEA-maintained schools	22	20	22
Grant-maintained schools	16	13	13

[1] Number of day pupils who were known to be eligible for free school meals expressed as a proportion of the number of day pupils on roll.
[2] Includes maintained special schools.

Schools (Commercial Advertising)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will consult by letter the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority concerning the proposed sale of space on school noticeboards and walls for commercial advertising; and if she will publish its reply; [37756]

(2) what assessment she has made of the effect of the use of space on school noticeboards and walls for commercial advertising on the promotion of moral education in schools; [37757]

(3) what is her policy in respect of schools selling space on walls and noticeboards for commercial advertising; and what procedures are available to people who wish to make complaints about specific instances of such advertising. [37758]

Mr. Paice: The extent to which an individual school enters into such an arrangement is a matter for the head teacher and governors of the school concerned. Anyone who wants to complain should address themselves to the head teacher and governors.

My right hon. Friend has made no assessment of the effect of such arrangements and does not propose to write to the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority about it.

Grant-maintained Schools (Devon)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each grant-maintained school in Devon *(a)* the amount of carry-forward in their budgets from 1995–96 to 1996–97 and *(b)* the amounts of special purposes VAT grant which each school received. [37868]

Mr. Robin Squire: These matters are now the responsibility of the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the agency to arrange for a reply to be sent to the hon. Member.

Schools (Parents' Choice)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total number of appeals made by parents against the non-admission of their child to the school of their choice in 1994–95; how many appeals were considered by a statutory committee; and, of these, how many were (i) rejected and (ii) found in the parents' favour. [38576]

Mrs. Gillan: The available information is shown in the table:

	Number
Total appeals lodged[1]	54,427
Appeals heard by a statutory committee[2]	38,032
Appeals rejected	23,169
Appeals found in parents' favour	14,839

[1] Includes appeals which were withdrawn by parents or settled to mutual satisfaction before reaching a statutory committee.
[2] Includes appeals heard by a statutory committee for which a decision was still to be made at the end of the academic year.

Class Sizes

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was *(a)* the average class size and *(b)* the pupil-teacher ratio in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools in North Yorkshire in 1978–79, 1992–93 and 1995–96. [38872]

Mr. Robin Squire: The available information is shown in the table:

Average class size[1] and pupil-teacher ratios in maintained primary and secondary schools in North Yorkshire local education authority area: 1979, 1993 and 1995

Position in January each year

	Pupil-teacher ratios		*Average class sizes[1]*	
	Primary	*Secondary*	*Primary*	*Secondary*
1979	22.5	17.1	24.6	20.8
1993	22.6	15.8	25.4	20.3
1995	23.3	16.3	26.2	20.7

[1] Average size of single teacher classes as taught during a single selected period on the census day.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the number and percentage of primary school children in classes of 31 or more, per local education authority and nationally, in *(a)* maintained schools, *(b)* grant-maintained schools, *(c)* independent schools and *(d)* in total for the maintained sector. [38864]

Mr. Squire: The latest available information for all maintained and GM schools is shown in the table. Information on class sizes in independent schools is not collected centrally. Information for LEA-maintained schools is not given to avoid disclosure of information for individual GM schools, through deduction.

Authority area in	*Number and percentage*			
	All maintained		*Of which*	
	Pupils	*Percentage[1]*	*Pupils*	*Percentage[1]*
Corporation of London	[2]—	[2]—	n/a	n/a
Camden	605	6.7	n/a	n/a
Greenwich	2,555	14.5	[2]—	[2]—

Authority area in	Number and percentage			
	All maintained		Of which	
	Pupils	Percentage[1]	Pupils	Percentage[1]
Hackney	569	4.0	[2]—	[2]—
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,294	16.6	n/a	n/a
Islington	1,055	8.1	n/a	n/a
Kensington and Chelsea	221	4.5	[2]—	[2]—
Lambeth	540	3.4	190	10.9
Lewisham	1,192	6.4	[2]—	[2]—
Southwark	2,483	12.7	221	14.3
Tower Hamlets	778	5.1	n/a	n/a
Wandsworth	1,459	10.3	[2]—	[2]—
Westminster	646	9.4	n/a	n/a
Barking	1,317	8.7	n/a	n/a
Barnet	2,291	10.9	[2]—	[2]—
Bexley	7,834	39.2	434	63.9
Brent	2,444	13.0	164	22.5
Bromley	11,596	51.8	1,035	45.5
Croydon	5,973	23.7	611	42.5
Ealing	4,137	19.2	0	0.0
Enfield	8,192	39.7	[2]—	[2]—
Haringey	1,045	6.0	n/a	n/a
Harrow	4,152	25.5	n/a	n/a
Havering	4,662	24.1	n/a	n/a
Hillingdon	4,833	26.4	406	13.9
Hounslow	5,691	34.1	n/a	n/a
Kingston upon Thames	6,216	64.0	[2]—	[2]—
Merton	3,299	26.2	n/a	n/a
Newham	2,680	11.3	n/a	n/a
Redbridge	8,337	51.5	n/a	n/a
Richmond upon Thames	2,040	20.4	n/a	n/a
Sutton	4,328	35.7	392	51.8
Waltham Forest	3,330	18.8	n/a	n/a
Birmingham	28,251	29.2	923	53.9
Coventry	7,875	29.4	n/a	n/a
Dudley	6,935	28.5	[2]—	[2]—
Sandwell	10,815	39.1	n/a	n/a
Solihull	7,506	40.3	[2]—	[2]—
Walsall	6,428	27.9	[2]—	[2]—
Wolverhampton	5,846	26.8	n/a	n/a
Knowsley	6,300	34.7	n/a	n/a
Liverpool	12,541	27.0	n/a	n/a
St. Helens	5,507	37.4	n/a	n/a
Sefton	8,793	35.1	n/a	n/a
Wirral	6,076	20.7	n/a	n/a
Bolton	10,366	45.9	[2]—	[2]—
Bury	6,434	41.1	[2]—	[2]—
Manchester	10,211	24.2	n/a	n/a
Oldham	8,823	41.0	n/a	n/a
Rochdale	8,102	41.8	924	56.9
Salford	6,975	30.8	n/a	n/a
Stockport	7,858	31.8	n/a	n/a
Tameside	11,291	51.8	n/a	n/a
Trafford	9,689	51.1	n/a	n/a
Wigan	11,375	42.7	n/a	n/a
Barnsley	6,201	30.9	n/a	n/a
Doncaster	8,338	31.7	n/a	n/a
Rotherham	3,269	14.4	n/a	n/a
Sheffield	11,119	28.3	317	23.5
Bradford	10,707	32.4	448	28.9
Calderdale	5,666	30.9	393	32.1
Kirklees	12,290	38.2	n/a	n/a
Leeds	21,245	35.1	[2]—	[2]—
Wakefield	10,544	37.8	n/a	n/a
Gateshead	2,237	13.2	n/a	n/a
Newcastle upon Tyne	6,744	33.1	n/a	n/a
North Tyneside	4,930	32.7	n/a	n/a
South Tyneside	3,618	24.7	n/a	n/a
Sunderland	3,601	13.5	n/a	n/a
Isles of Scilly	0	0.0	n/a	n/a
Avon	26,919	34.5	n/a	n/a
Bedfordshire	10,328	26.7	276	42.1
Berkshire	15,605	26.8	299	13.7
Buckinghamshire	21,248	35.6	785	30.4
Cambridgeshire	14,946	26.8	31	1.6
Cheshire	30,315	35.5	201	39.1
Cleveland	13,859	23.7	n/a	n/a
Cornwall	14,004	35.6	n/a	n/a
Cumbria	11,452	29.0	814	28.0
Derbyshire	32,959	42.7	757	36.5
Devon	23,659	29.8	[2]—	[2]—
Dorset	18,038	42.8	[2]—	[2]—
Durham	15,455	29.5	n/a	n/a
East Sussex	19,691	40.8	n/a	n/a
Essex	31,875	25.8	7,213	35.6
Gloucestershire	11,595	26.7	1,073	23.2
Hampshire	43,976	33.9	963	25.3
Hereford and Worcester	10,533	21.8	n/a	n/a
Hertfordshire	23,054	29.0	831	37.2
Humberside	26,842	33.8	39	10.7
Isle of Wight	1,860	26.4	n/a	n/a
Kent	44,208	34.4	2,350	35.0
Lancashire	48,832	40.4	474	59.0
Leicestershire	17,567	23.6	n/a	n/a
Lincolnshire	14,632	29.8	1,547	20.3
Norfolk	12,066	20.5	312	9.3
North Yorkshire	17,758	31.3	[2]—	[2]—
Northamptonshire	10,576	21.9	348	10.8
Northumberland	8,030	41.8	n/a	n/a
Nottinghamshire	23,142	27.8	n/a	n/a
Oxfordshire	6,422	16.4	[2]—	[2]—
Shropshire	9,972	29.0	65	8.5
Somerset	10,776	30.1	136	26.7
Staffordshire	31,147	35.3	0	0.0
Suffolk	6,396	15.1	n/a	n/a
Surrey	12,118	17.7	765	18.1
Warwickshire	13,980	32.9	n/a	n/a
West Sussex	12,879	24.2	[2]—	[2]—
Wiltshire	14,703	31.0	1,093	29.7
England	1,155,715	29.6	28,293	27.9

[1] Number of pupils in.
[2] Figures suppressed.
n/a = not applicable.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the advantages of extending the nursery voucher scheme to include child minding facilities. [38407]

Mr. Robin Squire: My noble Friend the Minister of State and I recently met the National Childminding Association. We are presently considering the association's framework document with the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority and the Office for Standards in Education.

Modern Apprenticeships Scheme

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many persons are presently on the modern apprenticeship scheme *(a)* nationally and *(b)* by training and enterprise council area; and if he will list for each subject area the number of modern apprenticeships and in each training and enterprise council area the percentage taking each subject area. [38784]

Mr. Paice: As the reply will consist of a large amount of data, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Schools (Expenditure)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much money was spent in state

schools and colleges in 1995–96 per pupil or student in *(a)* nursery classes, *(b)* primary classes, *(c)* secondary classes and *(d)* further education funding council colleges in (i) North Yorkshire and (ii) England. [38871]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on spending in maintained schools in 1995–96 is not yet available and information on the spend per student in further education colleges is not available in the form requested.

Schools (Statutory Duties)

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many complaints were made under section 99 of the Education Act 1944 in each of the years 1990 to 1996; in respect of how many of these complaints she was satisfied that a local education authority or school governing body had failed to discharge a statutory duty; and in how many cases she made an order declaring the local education authority or the governors to be in default of that duty. [38667]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend receives many representations about the functions of local education authorities and governing bodies of schools and they are followed up where it seems appropriate to do so. The Department does not maintain a register of all complaints.

Departmental Budget

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to the answer of 12 July, *Official Report*, column *330*, what factors led to a running cost underspend of £94,889,000 in the Department of Education and Employment. [38812]

Mr. Squire: The Department for Education and Employment has an entitlement to end-year flexibility on running costs of £94.9 million. This amount comprises underspends from 1995–96 and previous years.

The 1995–96 underspend was £55 million. Of this amount, £36 million was the result of reducing work loads in the Employment Service, largely because of falling unemployment.

The main factors giving rise to the balance of the 1995–96 underspend were payments falling due later than expected and the early achievement of some efficiency savings planned for 1996–97.

Employment Service

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the work of the Employment Service in 1995–96; and if she will make a statement. [39237]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I am pleased to announce that the Employment Service—ES—achieved excellent results in 1995–96. It has met or exceeded all but two of its targets this year, giving record levels of help to unemployed people. I have today placed a copy of the ES's annual report and accounts in the Library. It shows that over 1.93 million unemployed people were placed into work, of whom almost 566,000 had been out of work for six months or more. They exceeded their targets for placing people with disabilities and people in inner cities.

I want the ES to continue to work as hard this year, as it has an important part to play in the successful delivery of the jobseeker's allowance. I have set the ES targets for 1996–97 that will require it to build on last year's extremely good performance; in the light of the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance in October, they will be especially challenging.

The targets include placing 1.97 million unemployed people into jobs, over 580,000 of whom will have been out of work for six months or more.

Medical Teaching and Research

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the total allocation for 1996–97 of the service increment for teaching and research in England; and what proportion is allocated to the costs of general practice teaching in each medical school and university. [38395]

Mr. Malone: I have been asked to reply.

In 1996–97, £458 million has been made available through the service increment for teaching in England to support the clinical teaching of medical and dental undergraduates in trusts and general practices. It is for regional offices to agree with each medical school dean an indicative budget and to agree what proportion of this will be used to support teaching in general practice.

Information is not yet available centrally on the proportion of medical SIFT which has been used to support clinical teaching in a general practice setting.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to ensure that housing benefit will continue to be available to provide staff and support services to residents of local authority sheltered housing. [38256]

Mr. Roger Evans: We have recently commissioned an interdepartmental review of the funding of services in supported accommodation. This will consider whether it is appropriate that housing benefit should meet charges for personal services in sheltered housing. We will consider the position when the review is complete.

Benefit Fraud (Nottingham)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent on commercial advertising for the campaign "Help Us Pick Out Nottingham's Benefit Cheats"; and how much has been spent nationally on the campaign. [33873]

Mr. Heald: Forecasted expenditure is £26,000 locally and £440,000 nationally for this financial year.

Benefits

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those benefits which have fallen in real terms since 1979; and if he will list *(a)* the size of each shortfall and *(b)* the number of people currently claiming each benefit now and in 1979. [35647]

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* The information is set out in the table:

Benefit	*Current rate (£)*	*November 1979 rate at April 1996 prices*	*Difference between the two rates*	*Number in receipt in 1979*	*Latest available numbers in receipt*	*Date of latest available numbers*
Child Special Allowance[1]	[3]11.15	17.98	6.83	825	55	1 January 1996
Child Dependency increases— Retirement Pension, Widows Benefit, Unemployment Benefit[2]	[3]11.15	17.98	6.83	192,870	63,520 (RP and WB only)30 September (RP and WB only)	
Guardians Allowances[1]	[3]11.15	17.98	6.83	3,669	2,147	1 January 1996
One Parent Benefit[1]	[3]6.30	6.33	0.33	381,000	941,000	31 December 1994
Retirement Pension Age Addition	0.25	0.63	0.38	1,467,000	2,294,000	30 September 1995
Christmas Bonus	10.00	25.33	15.33	9,159,000 RP/WB 729,000 IVB/SDA	9,995,000 RP/WB 2,015,000 IVB/SDA	Note 4
Maternity Adult Dependency Increase[5]	28.55	29.00	0.45	1,000	—	—
War Pensions:						
Unemployment Allowance Increase for 1st child	[3]9.90	17.98	8.08	n/a	n/a	n/a
Unemployment Allowance increase for other children	[3]11.15	17.98	6.83	n/a	n/a	n/a
WWP increase for 1st child	[3]14.10	25.33	11.23	n/a	n/a	n/a
WWP increase for subsequent child	[3]15.35	25.33	9.98	n/a	n/a	n/a
Orphans Pensions increase for 1st child	[3]15.85	26.85	11.00	[6]n/a	[6]n/a	[6]n/a
Orphans Pensions increase for subsequent child	17.10[3]	26.85	9.75	[6]n/a	[6]n/a	[6]n/a

[1] The figures are for the number of families who receive the benefit.

[2] Current figures for Unemployment Benefit Child Dependency Increases (UB CDI) recipients are not available. The 1979 figures are produced from an average of May 1979 and November 1979 based on a 5 per cent. sample of unemployed claimants. UB CDIs were abolished for claimants under pensionable age in November 1984. Consequently, the numbers receiving a CDI are very small and cannot be identified separately.

[3] The formula used for calculating these allowances takes account of the Retail Prices Index and any increase in Child Benefit. Child Benefit, however, is paid in addition to the allowances.

[4] Source for Retirement Pension/Widows Benefit recipients of the Christmas Bonus is the biannual enquiry using a 10 per cent. sample in November 1979 and a 5 per cent. sample in September 1995.

Figures for Invalidity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance recipients are based on a 1 per cent. sample in June 1979 and April 1995. They do not take into account entitlement conditions i.e. the residence test, the effect of overlapping benefits, or the number of adult dependants as they are purely numbers of beneficiaries at the given dates.

[5] The rate of the Maternity Allowance Adult Dependency Increase was abated by 5 per cent. at November 1980 reflecting the intention to make Maternity Allowance taxable. The 1979 figure includes the 12 months to 31 March 1980 rounded to the nearest thousand. No reliable data exists for the latest period.

[6] Individual figures are not available. However, the combined total of orphans pensions in payment to both first children and subsequent children was 400 in 1979 and 528 on 31 March 1996.

n/a = Figures are not available.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Hinchcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what entitlements, and when, persons in private hospital or nursing home care, outside the NHS, will lose to mobility component disability living allowance as a result of proposed changes to benefit entitlements; and when this will apply. [38113]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The changes, which come into effect on 31 July, will apply only to people regarded, for benefit purposes, as hospital in-patients maintained free of charge by the NHS. Those affected by the change will have the payment of the mobility component of disability living allowance interrupted but underlying entitlement will not be affected.

Mr. Hinchcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what research he has conducted into the effect of proposals to change regulations for mobility component disability living allowance and the potential change to transport costs within the national health service following the response of the Social Security Advisory Committee on SI, 1996, No. 1436; [38111]

(2) what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the effects of proposals to change regulations for mobility component disability living allowance concerning transport costs which may be claimed under social fund rules, for persons wishing to visit hospitalised relatives. [38112]

Mr. Mitchell: None. Social security benefits have never been available to meet NHS costs. Disability living allowance is an extra-costs benefit intended to help individuals meet the additional expenses associated with their disability; the mobility component is primarily intended to help them become independently mobile. Changes to the payability of a personal benefit should have no significant impact on help which is already available for fares to visit relatives in hospital.

Mr. Hinchcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the proposed transitional protection conditions for mobility component disability living allowance to persons detained under part II or part III of the Mental Health Act 1983 require such people to be treated under social security regulations in an identical manner to persons committed to hospital following involvement in criminal proceedings; and if he will make a statement. [38114]

Mr. Mitchell: No.

The Department's position is explained at paragraphs 28 to 31 of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's statement in response to the report by the Social Security Advisory Committee on the Social Security (Disability Living Allowance and Claims and Payments) Amendment Regulations, contained in Cm 3233, published on 7 June, a copy of which is in the Library.

Operation Spotlight

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will *(a)* list the figures for weekly benefit savings achieved in each area where Operation Spotlight has taken place, *(b)* give a breakdown of these savings by the initiative which detected the fraud and *(c)* indicate how long each person from whom benefit was withdrawn remained out of receipt of benefit. [35975]

Mr. Heald *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

Where the spotlight on benefit cheats campaigns have finished, and the majority of results are available, the total amount of benefit savings achieved so far for the relevant months is as follows. The final savings for the area in 1995–96 are also shown to give a comparison of the relative success of the spotlight campaign.

£ million

	Total savings in spotlight period (4 weeks)	*Full-year fraud savings for 1995–96*
Croydon	1.6	2.6
Haringey and Enfield	4.1	5.6
Edinburgh	3.6	9.0
Glasgow	3.2	25.7
Westminster and Camden	0.8	3.5
Leeds	3.2	6.4

1. Figures as at 5 July 1996.

2. There are variations in the size and composition of the spotlight areas and the type of anti-fraud activities in each place. Simple comparisons of on area's results with another's would therefore be misleading and should be avoided.

3. The savings shown are from fraud detection activity, and do not take account of any deterrent effect that may have resulted from the surrounding publicity. Spotlight has also generated additional savings from housing benefit fraud detected by local authorities, and extra activity for other agencies and departments, such as the Contributions Agency, Child Support Agency, Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise, and the immigration service.

4. Although spotlight operations have now finished in Birmingham, Nottingham and Bristol, cases referred during the operational period continue to be processed, and results are still being evaluated. Spotlight operations also continue in the Isle of Wight, Lancaster and Barrow in Furness, Cardiff, Plymouth, Great Yarmouth, Brighton, Darlington, Rhyl and the Medway towns.

5. The individual savings figures have been calculated using the normal 32-week methodology, which is approved by the Treasury and the National Audit Office.

Weekly benefit savings for other areas are not yet finalised, but the total estimated savings for the campaigns so far, including the above, now exceed £27 million.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many maintenance accounts held by the Child Support Agency were in arrears between April 1995 to the end of March 1996; and what was the amount outstanding. [37421]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 19 July 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency accounts.

The total maintenance debt outstanding as at 31 March 1995 was £525.187m. The number of cases with maintenance outstanding recorded against them is not available as the Agency's Financial Management System could not provide this information at that time, although it has since been developed to do so.

As at 31 March 1996 the number of cases with at least some amount of maintenance outstanding recorded (even if this was the subject of an agreed repayment arrangement) was 267,720. The total maintenance debt outstanding at this date was £895.569m, an analysis of which is included in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts published on 16 July 1996.

I hope this is helpful.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Competitive Tendering

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what changes he plans to introduce during the current round of competitive tendering for health and education services in Northern Ireland on the basis of recommendations made by the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland on equal opportunities and the competitive tendering process. [38100]

Sir John Wheeler: Any such changes will be considered in the context of the Government's response to the Equal Opportunities Commission regarding its report and recommendations.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what response he has made to the recommendations made by the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland in the report on its formal investigation into competitive tendering in health and education services. [38099]

Sir John Wheeler: I have not yet responded to the report and recommendations and will do so as soon as is practicable.

Terrorist Crime (Prison Releases)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons convicted of terrorist crimes have been released since the IRA and loyalist paramilitary ceasefires began; how many of these were connected with each terrorist/paramilitary organisation; what percentage of their sentence they had served; and how many of those released were serving a life sentence. [38617]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Prison Service under its chief executive, Mr. A. Shannon. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Shannon to Mr. William Ross, dated 22 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question regarding the number of persons convicted of terrorist crimes who have been released since the IRA and Loyalist paramilitary ceasefires began; how many of these were connected with each terrorist/paramilitary organisation; what percentage of their sentence they had served; and how many of those released were serving life sentences.

The information that you are seeking is not readily available in the form requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. However, I can confirm that since 17 November 1995, 131 scheduled offenders have been released on licence, between the half way and two thirds part of sentence, as a result of the changes in remission rules brought in by the Northern Ireland (Remission of Sentence) Act 1995. I can further confirm that since 1 September 1994, 41 life sentence prisoners convicted of scheduled offences have been released on licence in accordance with the normal life sentence review procedures. *All* other prisoners released during the relevant period were released "time served"

I hope this information is helpful.

Access Funds

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number and value of access fund allocations made by education and library boards and higher education institutions since their introduction. [37211]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is given in the table.

Access fund allocations made by Higher Education Institutions and Education and Library Boards

	1990–91		*1991–92*		*1992–93*		*1993–94*		*1994–95*	
	Number	*Expenditure £000*	*Number*	*Expenditure £000*	*Number*	*Expenditure £000*	*Number*	*Expenditure £000*	*Number*	*Expenditure £000*
Institution/ Board	*Academic year*	*Financial year*[1]	*Academic year*	*Financial year*[1]	*Academic year*	*Financial year*[1]	*Academic year*	*Financial year*[1]	*Academic year*	*Financial year*[1]
Queen's University	2,230	173	2,196	191	1,964	186	1,882	228	1,807	229
University of Ulster	1,185	150	1,583	151	1,252	152	1,575	193	1,727	215
Stranmillis College	6	4	48	12	81	17	18	9	38	9
St. Mary's College	153	14	269	23	350	23	52	15	50	14
Belfast Board	79	24	154	85	135	77	160	81	161	88
North-Eastern Board	25	8	93	35	103	52	163	59	141	74
Southern Board	67	25	182	55	n/a[2]	65	35	72	153	91
South-Eastern Board	32	23	79	48	43	38	106	47	110	75
Western Board	175	28	209	59	181	62	343	68	215	83

[1] Figures for universities and colleges relate to their financial year i.e. August to July while figures for boards relate to the Government financial year.

[2] The records are not available.

Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a list showing the number, nature and value of contracts award by his Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton, BDO Stoy Hayward, Pannel Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996.[37322]

Sir John Wheeler: The total value of contracts awarded by the Northern Ireland Office and the Departments of Economic Development, of Education, of the Environment and of Finance and Personnel to all the companies listed and their subsidiaries and associates in 1995–96 was £1,962,095. The information is not available in the form requested in the Departments of Agriculture and of Health and Social Services. However, these Departments paid £474,326 to these companies and their subsidiaries in 1995–96. The value of contracts awarded and payments made to individual companies cannot be provided for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

The total number and nature of contracts awarded in the Northern Ireland Office and the Departments of Agriculture, of Economic Development, of Education, of the Environment, and of Finance and Personnel are as follows:

Company	*Number*	*Nature of contracts*
Coopers and Lybrand	53	Management Consultancy Financial Consultancy Information and Control systems Evaluation Projects Training Project Research/Review Investment Appraisal Miscellaneous
KPMG	9	Management Consultancy Projects Surveys Market Testing Marketing
Price Waterhouse	12	Management Consultancy Financial Consultancy Production Management
Ernst and Young	7	Financial Appraisal
Deloitte and Touche (including Touche Ross)	23	Management Consultancy Financial Consultancy Evaluation Projects Investment Appraisal Market Testing Miscellaneous
BDO Stoy Hayward	4	Management Consultancy Financial Consultancy Market Testing
Pannel Kerr Forster	1	Prior Options Study

Information on the number of contracts awarded in the Department of Health and Social Services is not available. However, the nature of contracts awarded is as follows:

Company	*Nature of Contracts*
Coopers and Lybrand	Management Consultancy Financial Consultancy Project Research
KPMG	Financial Consultancy
Price Waterhouse	Management Consultancy Financial Consultancy Evaluation Projects VFM study
Ernst and Young	Financial Consultancy
Deloitte and Touche (including Touche Ross)	Management Consultancy Financial Consultancy Evaluation Projects

Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton and Robson Rhodes were not awarded any contracts.

Education (Expenditure)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current annual expenditure by *(a)* Department of Education and *(b)* each other education administrative body in Northern Ireland; and what percentage this constitutes of expenditure on education. [37219]

Mr. Ancram: The administrative and other running costs are as follows:

	1996–97 £(000)
DENI	16,047
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools	1,450
Education and Library Board:	
Belfast	3,935
North-Eastern	5,239
South-Eastern	3,897
Southern	4,312
Western	3,775
NI Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment	1,751
NI Council for Integrated Education	378
Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards	194
	40,978

This represents 2.92 per cent. of overall expenditure on the relevant areas of education. The figures given are estimates for the 1996–97 financial year and those for the education and library boards exclude the costs of earmarked initiatives which formerly were included as part of headquarters administration costs and which in 1994–95 amounted to £4.1 million. The administrative costs of DENI relate not only to the services provided by the other bodies listed but to higher education, the museum service, the arts and sport.

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation Order

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the next NFFO order is due to be published. [38619]

Mr. Ancram: Consideration of the composition of a second non-fossil fuel obligation order is nearing completion. An announcement is likely to follow within the next two weeks.

Student Loans

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list student loan take-up rates in Northern Ireland since their introduction expressed by institution, sex, and age group. [37214]

Mr. Ancram: Available information is given in the table. Information by sex and age could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Student loan percentage take up rates by Institution

Institution	*1990–91*	*1991-92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education	19	35.5	61.25	78.3	100
East Antrim Institute of Higher and Further Education[1]	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	20
Fermanagh College	Nil	Nil	20	5	40
Greenmount College of Agriculture	Nil	6	14	10	24
Lisburn College	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	25
Loughrey College of Agriculture and Food Technology	8	12	30	30	60
Newry and Kilkeel College of Further and Higher Education	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	70
North-Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education	6	Nil	25.0	32.5	100
North-East Institute of Further and Higher Education[2]	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	90
Northern Ireland Hotel and Catering College, Portrush	2	2	12.5	14.3	29.3
North-West Institute of Further and Higher Education	22	26	12	14.6	19.2
Portadown College[3]	8	16	24	30	20
Queen's University, Belfast	22.8	34	42.9	49.6	55
St. Mary's College, Belfast	7.8	24	35.7	44.6	49.9
Stranmillis College, Belfast	7.6	10.6	14.1	20.4	25.6
University of Ulster	21.3	30.6	37.1	37.8	54.8

Sex Offenders

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the offences in Northern Ireland law which are analogous to those covered by the proposals on address registration in the Home Office consultation paper "Sentencing and Supervision of Sex Offenders"; how many people in Northern Ireland were convicted of those offences over the last three years; of those how many received a custodial sentence; and of those so gaoled, how many were convicted of crimes which did not involve minors and an absence of consent. [36661]

Sir John Wheeler: I have placed in the Library a list of Northern Ireland sexual offences, analogous to those included at annexe A of the Home Office consultation paper "Sentencing and Supervision of Sex Offenders".

Details of persons in Northern Ireland convicted of such offences and sentenced to immediate custody are as follows:

Persons convicted of sex offences and those sentenced to immediate custody in Northern Ireland 1993 to 1995[1]

	Total convicted of sex offences	*Total given immediate custody*
1993	125	65
1994	147	61
1995	179	77
Total	451	203

[1] The statistics relate to convictions where the sex offence was the principal offence.

Statistics are not collated on those convicted of crimes which do not involve minors and an absence of consent and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Civil Service (Terrorist Damage)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* claims and or *(b)* counter-claims each of the Northern Ireland civil service departments and agencies has commenced in the last five years in relation to damage and injury caused by individuals because of their involvement in terrorism; and if he will make a statement. [36662]

Sir John Wheeler: The Northern Ireland departments and agencies have not commenced any claims or counter claims in the last five years in relation to damage and injury caused by individuals because of their involvement in terrorism. For the Northern Ireland Office and its agencies the information is not available in the form requested. However, the total value of recoveries under the criminal injuries and criminal damage schemes in the last five years is:

	Amount recovered £000
1991–92	182
1992–93	232
1993–94	246
1994–95	376
1995–96	356

To identify the total number of cases would incur disproportionate cost.

Wind Farms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the costs of the transmission lines from a wind generation farm to the Northern Ireland grid are included in the capital costs; and who is responsible for *(a)* erecting the line and *(b)* maintaining it. [38618]

Mr. Ancram: The transmission line and connection facility cost of a renewable energy scheme is treated as a capital cost element and payment for it is made in full to Northern Ireland Electricity plc, before the project commences. NIE is responsible for erecting and maintaining transmission lines.

Mr. Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the cost of the wind farm being installed at the new Causeway hospital; what is *(a)* the height of the tower, *(b)* the highest point of the blades and *(c)* the size of the turbine; and what were the original dimensions proposed. [38620]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Health Estates under its chief executive, Mr. R.H. Browne. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from R. H. Browne to Mr. William Ross, dated 19 July 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning the proposed Wind Turbine at Causeway Hospital.

The estimated cost of the turbine, including installation and associated builder's work is £280,000.

The dimensions of the proposed Wind Turbine based on an individual manufacturer's specification are as follows:

Height of Tower = 30.5m

Height of blades from ground at maximum position = 46.0m

Size of Turbine = 300KW rating

These dimensions have not changed since the original design.

It is hoped that the above information fully explains the situation but should you require any further details I will be happy to provide them.

Mourne Conduit

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what extra costs have been incurred as a result of the decision not to lay asbestos cement pipes in the contract for the Mourne conduit. [38813]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Water Service under its chief executive, Mr. H. R. F. Plester. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from H. R. F. Plester to Mr. William Ross, dated 22 July 1996:

Mr. Moss has asked me to reply to your parliamentary question asking what extra costs have been incurred as a result of the decision not to lay asbestos cement pipes in the contract for the Mourne conduit.

The decision not to lay asbestos cement pipes in the contracts for parts of the Mourne Conduit was taken after consideration of the implications of a detailed report prepared by the Water Research Centre. Taking into account the estimated whole life costs of installation, maintenance and decommissioning it is considered unlikely that any significant additional costs will accrue.

Cattle Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what restrictions apply to the interval between export and slaughter in respect of cattle exported *(a)* for further fattening and *(b)* for breeding from Northern Ireland. [38416]

Mr. Ancram: Prior to the present ban on the export of bovines, Commission decision 94/474 permitted only the export of calves less than six months old to member states providing they were slaughtered before the age of six months. Such calves are required to remain on the premises designated on the export health certificate until moved directly to slaughter.

Animals born in Northern Ireland are not exported to member states for breeding purposes.

There are no restrictions on the interval between export and slaughter in respect of cattle exported for *(a)* further fattening and *(b)* for breeding from Northern Ireland to third countries.

DEFENCE

Tornado GR4 (Logistic Support)

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to place a contract for the logistic support of the Royal Air Force's Tornado GR4 aircraft. [38909]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department has negotiated a major contract with British Aerospace for the logistic support of the new equipment on the RAF's Tornado GR4 aircraft over the next five years, and will sign a contract very soon. The contract will be worth well over £100 million to BAe and its major sub-contractors, GEC-Marconi Avionics and Smiths Industries. It will help to sustain approximately 400 to 500 jobs, primarily at sites in Warton, Edinburgh, Rochester, Portsmouth and Cheltenham.

The contract will introduce a new degree of industrial support to front-line aircraft, embracing training, spares, technical publications and ground equipment. It will transfer financial risk to industry and this, with the exacting performance targets we have agreed, will provide the RAF and the taxpayer with a high-quality and cost-effective service.

Equipment Co-operation

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 13 March to the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans), *Official Report*, columns *648-49*, what recent developments have taken place on the development of a new armoured vehicle in co-operation with France and Germany and on wider defence equipment co-operation with those two nations; and if he will make a statement. [38805]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Agreement has now been reached with France and Germany to amend tender documents to reflect the UK's requirement for a multi-role armoured vehicle. I have therefore written to my French and German colleagues confirming that we will join an international competition that is planned to lead to a

tri-lateral collaborative programme to design and produce an armoured utility vehicle. I have also informed them that the UK is pleased to join the armaments co-operation agency which the two nations decided last year to set up. We will now participate in the work necessary to establish the agency.

The new armaments structure offers the opportunity to improve the effectiveness of co-operation between our countries to meet the requirements of our armed forces. It will also provide a platform for the development of a more efficient and competitive European defence industry.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 July to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), *Official Report*, columns *27-28*, if he will make a statement on the mission and function of the Anglo-French Army Equipment Commission. [38497]

Mr. Soames: The Anglo-French Army Equipment Commission—AFAEC—is a bilateral Army-level forum chaired at major general level. It exists to identify opportunities for co-operation, with the aim of achieving standardisation and interoperability objectives agreed by the two armies. In particular, AFAEC activity seeks to promote collaboration in the areas of research and operational analysis thus promoting cost-effective, collaborative equipment programmes.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 July to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), *Official Report*, columns *27-28*, if he will make a statement on the mission and function of the Anglo-French future land systems study group. [38499]

Mr. Soames: The Anglo-French future land systems study group—AFFLSSG, or Groupe Franco Britannique d'Etude de Systemes Aeroterrestres Futurs—exists to provide a mechanism for exchanges between the UK and France in the areas of land systems operational analysis, military history, and the performance of army equipment and its cost. The group's UK activities are managed by the Directorate of Science (Land), and it reports to the Anglo-French Army Equipment Commission, AFAEC. It has an active programme of work, concentrating on exchanges of information and joint symposiums and studies.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 July to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) *Official Report*, columns *27–28*, if he will make a statement on the mission and function of the European co-operative long-term initiative for defence. [38498]

Mr. Soames: The European co-operation for the long-term initiative for defence—EUCLID—programme operates under the auspices of the Western European Armaments Group. Its mission may be described as the co-ordination of joint research and exploratory development programmes, involving defence industries, in a number of common European priority areas, CEPAs. It functions by establishing a number of research and technology projects, RTPs, within each CEPA by multi-national industrial consortiums representing the participating nations led by a single lead industrial entity, SLIE. RTP participation is undertaken on the basis of equal Government cost shares and with the expectation that additional industrial private venture contributions will be provided by the consortiums, and is subjected to competitive bidding. Full and active participation of nations with developing defence industries is encouraged, and nations that participate in an RTP have free use of the results obtained.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 July to the hon. Member for Rotherham, (Mr. MacShane) *Official Report*, columns *27–28*, if he will name the 14 separate working groups under the Anglo-French defence research group; and if he will make a statement on the missions and functions of each. [38496]

Mr. Soames: I regret that the answer I gave on the 8 of July to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) was inaccurate in identifying 14 separate working groups when in fact there are only 13.

The 13 working groups which are responsible to the Anglo-French defence research group—AFDRG—are as follows:

WG01—Aeronautics

WG02—Human Factors

WG03—Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Defence

WG05—Structural Materials

WG07—Energetic Materials

WG08—Electronic Systems

WG09—Electronic Components

WG10—Nuclear Blast Effects

WG11—Operational Research

WG12—Guided Weapons

WG13—Directed Energy Technology

WG14—Land Systems

WG15—Naval Research.

The mission of each is to initiate, sponsor, and monitor the progress of collaborative defence in the areas stated, a co-operative activity which takes place under the auspices of the Anglo-French memorandum of understanding, MOU, on defence research of 24 October 1989.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 July to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), *Official Report*, columns *27-28*, if he will list where each of the 60 officers on exchange/liaison are based; and if he will make a statement on the roles and functions of each. [38495]

Mr. Soames: The following is a list of the UK/French exchange and liaison officer posts based in France and the UK.

FRENCH OFFICERS IN UK

FRENCH NAVY

Exchange Officers

HMS Sandown: Lt.

Britannia Royal Navy College Dartmouth: Lt.

Principal Warfare Officer (PWO) at sea (Type 42): Lt.

Fighter Controller (FC) at sea (aircraft Carrier): Lt.

(aircraft carrier)

SO3 G3 Plans 3 Commando Brigade RM: Capt. RM

Project Related Posts

3 Posts "Horizon" Frigate programme: 1 x Capt. (Navy)

2 x Lt. Cdrs.

FRENCH AIR FORCE

Liaison Officers

HQ Infantry, Warminster: Lt. Col.

Signal school, Blandford: Lt. Col.

Director General Development and Doctrine

UPAVON: Col.

HQ Quarter Master General Andover: Col.

Army Staff College Camberley/RMAS: Lt. Col. (TA)

Exchange Officers

SO2 HQ Directorate Army Aviation, Wattisham: Capt.

1RHA Tidworth: Lt.

RCDS/London: Col.

FRENCH AIR FORCE

Liaison Officers

HQ 11 Group, RAF Bentley Priory: Lt. Col.

Empire Test Pilot School Boscombe Down: Cdr.

RAF Wyton: Cdr.

Exchange Officers

Staff Post RAF Brampton: Comdt.

Tornado GR1A Pilot, RAF Marham: Capt.

Tucano Qualified Flying Instructor (QFI), RAF Linton on Ouse: Lt.

F3 Pilot, RAF Coningsby: Capt.

Hawk (Qualified Flying Instructor (QFI), RAF Valley: Capt.

Gazelle Qualified Helicopter Instructor (QHI), RAF Shawbury: Capt.

Fighter Allocator, RAF Neatishead: Capt.

E-3D Pilot, RAF Waddington: Capt.

RAF Bracknell: Lt. Col.

UK OFFICERS IN FRANCE

ROYAL NAVY

Liaison Officers (LO)

French Jt. Planning Staffs International Dept. Creil: Cdr.

Principal Anti-Air Missile System (PAAMS) Officer; Paris (2 Posts): Cdr.

Exchange Officers

FNS Persee: Lt.

Ecole Navale, Brest: Lt.

Principal Warfare Officer (PWO) at sea: Lt.

Fighter Controller (FC) at sea: Lt.

9e Dima, Nantes: Capt. RM

ARMY

Liaison Officers

Army Headquarters, Metz: Col.

SO1 Commandement de la doctrine et de l'entrainement (CBE), Metz: Lt. Col.

SO1 Joint Service Staff College, Paris: Lt. Col.

School of Infantry, Montpellier: Lt. Col.

Engineer School, Angers: Lt. Col.

Ecole de St. Cyr, Coetquidan: Lt. Col.

Artillery School, Draguignan: Lt. Col.

Armoured School, Saumur: Lt. Col.

Exchange Officers

Pilot Aviation School, Le Luc: Lt. Col./Maj.

11 Airborne Div., Toulouse: Capt.

Project Related Posts

Tripartite Guided Weapon Project Office, Ruiel-Malmaison: Maj.

Trigat Tripartite Guided Weapon: Lt. Col.

ROYAL AIR FORCE

Liaison Officers

HQ Strike Command, Tavernay: Sqn. Ldr.

Merignac, Bordeaux: Sqn. Ldr.

Merignac, Bordeaux: Flt. Lt.

Exchange Officers

Airborne Equipment Officer L'Armee de L'Air, Paris: Sqn. Ldr.

Mirage 2000 Pilot, Nancy: Flt. Lt.

Qualified Flying Instructor (QFI), L'Ecole de L'Air, Salon: Flt. Lt.

Mirage 2000 Pilot, Orange: Flt. Lt.

Alphajet Instructor, Cazaux: Flt. Lt.

Alouette Qualified Flying Instructor (QFI), Toulouse: Flt. Lt.

Intercept Controller, Tours: Flt. Lt.

E-3D Pilot, Avord: Flt. Lt.

The role of a liaison officer is to act as a link between the two organisations. The role of an exchange officer is to work alongside the national officers of the host country and to perform a specific function within the host organisation.

Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number, nature and value of contracts awarded by his Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton, BDO Stoy Hayward, Pannel Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996. [37318]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information requested is shown in the table. The details have been extracted from my Department's central contracts database; there may, however, be other contracts, such as those placed by defence agencies, which have not been included. The central database does not include details of the specific nature of the contracts, and further details could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It is the policy of this Department not to release details of individual contract values and, as there have only been one or two contracts with some of these companies, to overcome this problem the following table includes some "banded" figures.

	Financial year	*Contracts*	*Approximate value*
Coopers and Lybrand	1994–95	11	£2 million
	1995–96	10	£1 million
KPMG	1994–95	8	Less than £1 million
	1995–96	7	Less than £1 million
Price Waterhouse	1994–95	15	£4 million
	1995–96	28	£2 million
Ernst and Young	1994–95	Fewer than five	Less than £1 million
	1995–96	Fewer than five	Less than £1 million

	Financial year	Contracts	Approximate value
Deloitte and Touche	1994–95	No contracts	
	1995–96	Fewer than five	Less than £1 million
Arthur Anderson	1994–95	Fewer than five	£2 million
	1995–96	Fewer than five	Less than £1 million
Grant Thornton	1994–95	No contracts	
	1995—96	Fewer than five	Less than £1 million
BDO Stoy Hayward	—	No contracts either year	
Panel Kerr Forster	1994–95	No contracts	
	1995–96	Fewer than five	Less than £1 million
Robson Rhodes	—	No contracts either year	

Army Base Repair Organisation

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the results of the current market testing of ABRO workshops; and if he will make a statement. [37889]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Army Base Repair Organisation under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Jim Drew to Mr. David Faber, dated 22 July 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about when he expects to announce the results of the current market testing of ABRO workshops as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO).

You may already be aware that a key target for the Agency in financial year 1996/97 is to recommend the results of the ABRO Land Command Support Service Market Test to the Minister of State for the Armed Forces by 31 January 1997. This service is currently delivered through a national network of workshops and contract repair offices—the ABRO Land Command Support Group. The approach adopted for the market test has been designed to ensure that bidders are encouraged to meet the full requirements of the service in the most cost effective way. Bidders are not confined to utilising the existing facilities employed by the Agency for this task; instead they may put forward their own innovative solutions.

Invitations to tender were issued in October 1995 but, because of the difficulties associated with competing this vast and complex activity, the date for tender returns has been extended and they are now due on 6 August 1996. Two commercial consortia and an in-house team are still in the running in the competition.

Because of the difficulties encountered thus far the timescale to meet the key target is very tight. Moreover the scope for innovation may produce some novel and unconventional proposals for evaluation when bids are received. Nevertheless it remains my objective to submit recommendations as early as possible in the New Year.

Greenham Common (Contamination)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions the paper by Cripps and Stimson on uranium and plutonium contamination around Greenham Common air force base has been reviewed with a view to its release since July 1995; and if he will make a statement on the criteria adopted to judge of its suitability for publication. [38220]

Mr. Soames: The report in question has been reviewed twice since July 1995, using Cabinet Office guidelines. On the first occasion, it was not considered suitable for its classification to be downgraded. The second review was prompted by recent public interest relating to Greenham Common: in these circumstances, it was judged appropriate to release the document.

Nuclear Co-operation Agreement

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 26 June, *Official Report*, columns *163–64*, if the United States Government have offered to provide Her Majesty's Government with a copy of the US-France nuclear co-operation agreement; and if the Government have requested of the United States Government details of what nuclear information or technology has been shared with France as a result of the arrangement. [38501]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We have neither asked for, nor been given, a copy of the memorandum of understanding signed on 4 June 1996. Nor have we sought details of what information or technology has been shared. Bilateral nuclear co-operation between the United States and France is a matter for the Governments concerned. Under the provisions of the UK-US 1958 mutual defence agreement for co-operation on the uses of atomic energy for defence purposes, the agreement of the United Kingdom would be required before any transfer by the United States of any nuclear weapons information of British provenance to France.

Lariam

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors were taken into account by his Department in deciding not to prescribe lariam as an anti-malarial prophylaxis for service pilots and air crew. [38425]

Mr. Soames: Lariam is not prescribed to pilots and air crew because of the possible side-effects of dizziness or distorted sense of balance, as advised by the manufacturer.

Military Bases

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what revenue has been received in each of the last three years from the selling of former military bases in England and Wales. [38315]

Mr. Soames: Records are not separately maintained for military bases, as distinct from other forms of property, or by individual countries, and the information could be provided in the form requested only at disproportionate cost. The overall receipts from the disposal of surplus property were £70.7 million in 1993–94, £64.3 million in 1994–95 and £63.4 million 1995–96.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what responsibility his Department retains for removing asbestos from redundant former military bases in England and Wales which have been sold. [38332]

Mr. Soames: None, unless a legal liability to do so can be shown to exist in any specific case.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the RAF's nuclear weapons role after the WE-177 is withdrawn from service. [38490]

Mr. Soames: RAF aircraft will have no operational nuclear role after WE177 is withdrawn from service.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many nights in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96 a member of the royal family spent aboard the royal yacht during official visits. [38503]

Mr. Soames: During the period 1994–95, members of the royal family spent 13 nights aboard HMY Britannia. In 1995–96, the total was 23 nights.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the origin and destination of the low-level flight northward over East Bessacarr and Carltey at 16.13 on 8 July; who authorised it; and what considerations led to its authorisation. [38326]

Mr. Soames: Two Tornado aircraft from the standards squadron, Tri-National Tornado Training Establishment, TTTE, normally based at RAF Cottesmore, but temporarily operating from RAF Marham, were conducting a circular low-level navigation training sortie. The sortie was authorised by the formation leader who is an instructor at the TTTE. As with all military low-level sorties, the authorising officer was responsible for ensuring that the flight complied with the regulations and procedures in the United Kingdom military low flying handbook and that the aircrew were suitably qualified to execute the planned sortie. Since Bessacarr is listed for avoidance by low-flying military aircraft, the RAF police are making further inquiries into the alleged overflight. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member when these have been completed.

Married Quarters Estate

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those companies which have expressed interest at any stage during the proposed sale of married quarters estate for whom an hon. Member acts as an advisor, consultant or director. [38613]

Mr. Arbuthnot: For reasons of commercial confidentiality, I am unable to disclose the identity of companies or other parties who have expressed an interest in the sale of the married quarters estate. However, the successful bidder will of course be announced when the sale is complete, and we shall at that point disclose as fully as possible the details of the transaction. Meanwhile, a copy of the preliminary information memorandum, which sets out the main features of the sale of the married quarters estate, is in the Library of the House. Further detailed information on the sale is contained in the Defence Committee's sixth report of Session 1995–96, published on 16 July (HC 424). The registered interests of hon. Members is a matter of public record.

Remploy Ltd.

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total value of all contracts placed by his Department with Remploy Ltd. in each of the last five years, in 1996 prices. [38345]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The following figures have been extracted from the central contracts database and are based on the financial year from 1 April to 31 March of the years in question. The values have not been converted to a 1996 baseline. It is possible that there may be other contracts placed in recent years by various Defence agencies which are no longer recorded on the central database. Identifying these could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost and it should be noted that as a result of this, a direct comparison from year to year may not show an accurate picture of the pattern of business with the company.

1991–92: £18.7 million

1992–93: £14.2 million

1993–94: £19.9 million

1994–95: £8.4 million

1995–96: £13.5 million.

Public Assets (Sale)

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will ensure that all information which is made available to those tendering for the sale of public assets held by his Department is also available to hon. Members before any debate on such a sale; [38614]

(2) what steps he will take to ensure that all hon. Members have equal access to information about the disposal of public assets held by his Department. [38615]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Information that is made available to those tendering for the sale of public assets held by my Department is also available to third parties except where such information is security classified or commercially confidential. Such information may not be passed on without the prior approval of my Department. Access to information provided by those who are responding to tenders for the sale of assets is a matter for the company concerned. The release of information in either direction to hon. Members will be determined by their status in relation to the bidding company.

Defence Postal and Courier Services

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost of publishing and distributing the annual report and accounts for 1995–96 of Defence Postal and Courier Services; and how many copies were printed. [38575]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Defence Postal and Courier Services under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from T. McG. Brown to Mr. Robert Key, dated 22 July 1996:

As Chief Executive of the Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency I am responsible for the production and distribution of my Agency's annual report and accounts and I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, the Rt. Hon Michael Portillo MP, regarding the cost of publishing and distributing the Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency's 1995/96 annual report and accounts, and the number of copies printed.

The number of copies printed was 2,000. The cost of publishing the report, which is borne by the Agency, was £11,627 and the cost of printing the report, which is borne by HMSO, was £11,600. Distribution costs will amount to around £40. Additionally MOD staff time and other minor costs were incurred, but these have not been quantified. Copies of the report are available from HMSO at £11.40 each.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the correct postal address of the Defence Postal and Courier Service's mail 2000 centre at Plymouth. [38574]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Defence Postal and Courier Services under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from T. McG. Brown to Mr. Robert Key, dated 22 July 1996:

As Chief Executive of the Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency I am responsible for Defence Mail Centres and I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, the Rt. Hon. Michael Portillo MP, regarding the correct address of the Defence Postal and Courier Services Mail 2000 Centre at Plymouth.

The correct address is:

Defence Mail Centre Plymouth

Building N161

HM Naval Base

Devonport

Plymouth

PL1 4SL

Although the establishment of Defence Mail Centres was part of the Mail 2000 plan, the centres themselves are correctly known as Defence Mail Centres, without reference to Mail 2000.

I hope this information is helpful.

Average Wind Speeds (Northern Ireland)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the average wind speed in Northern Ireland for each month of the last available full year at *(a)* sea level, *(b)* between 200 and 300 ft altitude, *(c)* at 600 to 700 ft altitude, or as much of such information as is readily available to him. [38639]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Meteorological Office under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of the Meteorological Office to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. A. Bittleston to Mr. William Ross, dated 22 July 1996:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about wind speeds in Northern Ireland as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Meteorological Office.

Average surface wind speeds (measured at 10m about ground level) are given below for each month of 1995 at 6 stations with heights above sea level between 12 and 235 metres.

There is no clear relationship between wind speed with height of the station above sea level. This is because surface wind is highly dependent on the geographical position and the local topography.

I hope you find this information useful.

Average monthly wind speeds for 1995 (in knots)

	Altitude (ft)	*January*	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*
Ballykelly	39	11.8	14.0	12.2	9.1	7.7	7.2	7.0	5.9	7.1	10.2	8.4	5.5
Hillsborough	154	8.8	9.5	8.9	6.7	6.6	6.8	6.3	6.0	5.6	8.5	7.3	6.3
Aldergrove	262	10.7	12.0	10.5	8.5	7.9	8.6	8.8	7.0	7.4	10.1	8.7	7.4
Ballypatrick	545	11.4	11.0	10.2	9.5	8.4	7.7	7.7	6.7	7.1	9.0	11.0	11.4
Gelnnanne	561	12.1	12.0	12.0	9.0	8.9	7.8	7.4	6.2	7.7	11.3	9.0	7.0
Lough Fea	771	0.1	9.4	10.4	8.5	7.6	7.2	6.6	5.7	6.8	7.9	6.8	5.2

Chemical Defence Establishment

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent volunteers in the service volunteers programme at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down, are informed before experiments of the possible long-term health effects of the chemical or chemical agent which is to be tested on them; and when this practice was introduced. [37621]

Mr. Arbutnot *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 July 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your question concerning the information provided to service volunteers about possible health effects from participation in studies at Porton Down. The Chemical Biological Defence Sector (CBD) at Porton Down is now part of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

All work involving the use of volunteers at Porton Down is subject to considerable scrutiny before a study can begin. Proposals for studies are examined by an internal review committee which must be satisfied that the proposed work is necessary, requires the use of volunteers and is not likely to have long term effects of the health of the volunteers. The study protocol must then be reviewed by the independent Ethics Committee who will recommend whether it should be accepted for inclusion in the volunteer programme. Only when this recommendation has been received can a study begin. The committee will not give their recommendation to any protocol where, in their judgement, there is likely to be long term effects on the health of the volunteers.

Prior to participating in a study, volunteers have the purpose of the study, the procedures to be carried out, any expected reactions they may experience and any risks the scientists involved in the study have identified explained to them so that the volunteers can give fully informed consent to participate in the study. This

procedure has been followed for many years but has been formally documented and included in submissions to the Ethics Committee since this was established in 1991.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research has been carried out by the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down, to investigate if *(a)* delayed recurrent keratitis of the eye, *(b)* chronic bronchitis and *(c)* emphysema can be caused by short-term exposure to mustard gas; when this research was carried out; and what were the results. [37618]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 July 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your question concerning research conducted on health effects caused by exposure to mustard agent. The Chemical Biological Defence Sector (CBD) at Porton Down is now part of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

Scientists at Porton Down are not aware of any research having been carried out at Porton Down to investigate whether delayed recurrent keratitis of the eye, chronic bronchitis or emphysema can be caused by short-term exposure to mustard gas.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful on this occasion.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information is provided to the War Pensions Agency by the Chemical Defence Establishment when individuals who took part in experiments at Porton Down claim disablement arising out of these experiments; if this information is available in its entirety to the claimant; and to what extent it includes *(a)* technical reports produced by Porton Down and *(b)* Porton Down's original laboratory data of the relevant experiments. [37619]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 July 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your question concerning the information provided to the War Pensions Agency by staff at Porton Down. The Chemical Biological Defence Sector (CBD) at Porton Down is now part of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

CBD provides a range of information to the War Pensions Agency (WPA) in response to enquiries from individuals who took part in experiments at Porton Down. Typically information provided to the WPA confirms the dates of attendance of the volunteer and, when available, an outline of the type of study in which he/she participated and the substances to which she/he was exposed. Where the service volunteer records provide any information regarding the results of such exposures this is also supplied. Relevant extracts from technical reports of original laboratory data, where they exist, would be included if considered helpful. Similar material is provided to the volunteers when they write directly requesting this information.

A copy of the material provided by Porton Down to the War Pensions Agency is not usually revealed to claimants unless an appeal against the WPA decision is made. In such circumstances a document called a "Statement of Case" is prepared to contain the relevant facts as known by the Secretary of State. This Statement of Case will be made available to the appellant. However Rule 22 of the Pensions Appeal Tribunals (England & Wales) Rules 1980 applies to any case where the medical history of the appellant comprises of material which, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, it would be undesirable in the interests of the appellant to disclose to him. This information will be marked for the Tribunal by broad "black lining" but will be omitted from the appellant's copy of the Statement of Case.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many scientific papers in the Porton memorandum series were produced by the Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down; when the first paper in the series was produced; when the series was closed; and how many papers in this series are currently unclassified. [37616]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 July 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your question concerning papers in the Porton Memorandum series. The Chemical Biological Defence Sector (CBD) at Porton Down is now part of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

The Porton Memorandum series contained a total of 42 reports. The first of these was published in August 1939 and the last in April 1951. According to the records held by the Porton Down Information Centre fourteen of these reports are currently unclassified.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the ban on military and civilian aircraft flying over the Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down began; and what factors underlay the decision to ban flights. [37615]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 July 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your question concerning flying by military and civilian aircraft over the Porton Down site. The Chemical Biological Defence Sector (CBD) at Porton Down is now part of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

There is an air exclusion zone (EGD 127) over the Porton Down site. This imposes the same restrictions on flights by military and civilian aircraft as are imposed in the large number of similar exclusion zones across the United Kingdom. It extends from the surface to 12,000 feet and its co-ordinates are defined in the Aeronautical Information Publication. The zone has been in force for over forty years and is in place because of the use made of the range area for experimental purposes.

Planned flights may be made by military aircraft taking part in trials on the range area and are restricted to predefined routes. Any civilian aircraft breaching the exclusion zone may be reported to the Civil Aviation Authority so that action can be taken against them.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the Chemical Defence Establishment's assessment of the effect on human health, in the *(a)* short-term and *(b)* long-term, of one-off exposure to Adamsite; and what research the establishment has conducted into such exposure. [37613]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 July 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your question concerning effects on human health of exposure to Adamsite. The Chemical Biological Defence Sector (CBD) at Porton Down is now part of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

CBD Sector at Porton Down has undertaken no research on the toxicology of Adamsite since the 1920s.

It is not our practice, for obvious reasons, to make available details of our assessment of the effectiveness of chemical warfare agents. The Ministry of Defence circulates to military medical staff descriptions of the symptoms of exposure to such substances. The symptoms of exposure to Adamsite (DM) consist of acute pain in the nose and sinuses with a sense of fullness in the head and headache. There is a burning sensation in the throat with tightness and pain in the chest, accompanied by violent sneezing and uncontrollable coughing. The eyes are affected with irritation, pain and lachrymation. Nasal secretions and salivation are greatly increased and nausea and vomiting develop. People who are exposed to Adamsite in the field suffer these symptoms for several hours but they then disappear leaving no obvious long term effects.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what studies have been carried out by the Chemical Defence Establishment Porton Down since 1966 to evaluate the long-term health effects of short-term exposure to the nerve agent Tabun; when these studies were conducted; and what were their conclusions; [37612]

(2) how many volunteers in the service volunteers programme at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down, have been exposed to the nerve agent Tabun since 1966; when was the last time that volunteers were exposed; and what was the conclusion reached following these experiments. [37620]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* These matters are for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 July 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your two questions about how many volunteers have been exposed to the nerve agent Tabun since 1966 at Porton Down and what work has been done to evaluate the long term health effects of short term exposures. I am replying to both questions in this letter since the Chemical and Biological Defence Sector (CBD) at Porton Down is now part of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

Mr. Harry Cohen MP asked a similar question earlier in the year and in my reply to him printed in the Official Report 16 January 1996, Column 529, I stated that work on Tabun had been conducted following the discovery of shells containing this agent after the collapse of the Third Reich. Work with volunteers ended over forty years ago and it would involve disproportionate costs to attempt to identify the precise date in the 1950s on which the last test was conducted. I also told Mr. Cohen the purpose of these studies was to evaluate the incapacitating effects of sub-lethal doses of this agent. The results of these studies were helpful in formulating appropriate defence measures against the threat nerve agents presented. No studies have been conducted since 1966 to evaluate long term health effects of exposure to this nerve agent.

I hope this information is helpful.

Shoeburyness Range

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints were received from the public about noise from the Shoeburyness range and locally related facilities in each of the last five years and 1996 to date. [37916]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 22 July 1996:

1. I have been asked to reply to your question about complaints from the public about noise from the range at Shoeburyness. I am Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation & Research Agency (DERA) which includes a trials and evaluation range at Shoeburyness, Essex.

2. As far as I am aware all the complaints about noise in the area relate to activities at the DERA Shoeburyness Range. This undertakes essential ammunition & gun proof testing, trials and evaluation of equipment and ordnance disposal activities on behalf of the Armed Forces and Ministry of Defence. The numbers of complaints over the period 1990 to 1995 are as follows:

1990: 73

1991: 47

1992: 223

1993: 420

1994: 912

1995: 635

The total number of complaints received so far in 1996 is 453, the monthly breakdown being as follows:

Jan: 236

Feb: 77

Mar: 39

Apr: 19

May: 60

Jun: 20

3. DERA has introduced a number of measures to mitigate the effects of noise on the local population. Sound propagation predictions are made twice a day, based on up to date meteorological data and trials activities are curtailed if predicted noise levels over inhabited areas exceed certain limits. One exception occurred in January 1996 where an operationally urgent trial related to the IFOR deployment of UK forces in Bosnia had to be conducted. In addition where a particular trial may result in loud noise, and many do not, advance warnings are given in the local press and on Essex radio. There is also a telephone enquiry service which gives notice to callers of daily range activities.

4. DERA is also looking at new methods to reduce the noise at source including enclosing firing points within earth ramparts or straw filled containers.

5. I hope this is helpful.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Clergy

42. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement on the link between the Church Commissioners and *(a)* archbishops, *(b)* bishops, *(c)* deans and provosts and *(d)* sub-deans and vice-provosts. [36759]

Mr. Alison: The 95 Church Commissioners include the two archbishops, the 41 diocesan bishops and five deans and provosts.

The commissioners are required by statute to provide the stipends of the archbishops, diocesan bishops and the dean or provost and two residentiary canons at each cathedral. No distinction is drawn in this respect between a dean or a provost or whether a residentiary canon whose stipend is provided by the commissioners is, or is not, a sub-dean or vice-provost. Under current arrangements, the commissioners also meet the full cost of the pensions of all clergy including those referred to.

The commissioners are by statute responsible for the housing and expenses of all diocesan bishops, including the archbishops. They also accept responsibility for the expenses of suffragan bishops.

Church Halls

43. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, how many church halls and community facilities have been disposed of in the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [36760]

Mr. Alison: The Church Commissioners do not have responsibility for the disposal of church halls or community facilities. There are no central records of such disposals.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid Agencies

36. **Mr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent consultations he has had over the regulation of aid agencies. [36788]

Mr. Hanley: We are in regular touch with aid agencies, but we have had no recent consultations over the regulation of aid agencies.

Central Europe

37. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what responsibilities he has for aiding and assisting the economies of the countries of central Europe. [36789]

Mr. Hanley: The Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), and my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development have responsibility for assistance to central European countries in transition, through the know-how fund, our emergency aid to Bosnia and our contributions to multilateral programmes of assistance.

Zambia

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current level of *(a)* total aid provided by Britain to Zambia and *(b)* programme aid provided by Britain to Zambia. [38403]

Mr. Hanley: In 1995–96, estimated expenditure on the British bilateral aid programme to Zambia was £29 million. Of this, £10 million was programme aid. Britain also provided substantial aid via the multilateral agencies, including the European Community, the World bank, and the UN agencies. Valuable assistance is also provided through the investments of the Commonwealth Development Corporation.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on the provision of aid to Zambia; what conditions are attached to the granting of such aid; and if he will make a statement. [38402]

Mr. Hanley: Our aid programme to Zambia addresses four key objectives: economic reform, direct assistance to poor people, human development—health and education—and good government. A country aid policy statement is available in the Library of the House. Each project will support specific action towards these ends. We have not provided programme aid this financial year, pending resolution of concerns over economic and governance issues in Zambia.

Conference of Cambodian Donors

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the recent conference of Cambodian donors and the role of the British delegation. [38222]

Mr. Hanley: The outcome of the Cambodia consultative group meeting was successful. Along with the leading donors—Japan, the World bank and the Asian development bank—the UK and other bilateral donors secured commitments from the Royal Government of Cambodia in the fields of human rights and economic policy, including steps to combat illegal logging, while donors pledged their continuing support for Cambodia's development.

The RGC committed itself to implementing the recommendations on forestry policy made by the World bank, the United Nations Development Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organisation and requested international experts and advisers to assist it in this process. In addition, the RGC stated its willingness to appoint a reputable international company to verify the export of logs and ensure transparency and accountability of revenues.

The RGC also committed itself to the democratic process, a free mass media, the rule of law and combatting corruption. Most donors, including the UK, in pledging further aid, made it clear that they expected to see further progress in these areas. The widespread presence of donors and non-governmental organisations in Cambodia and the UN centre for human rights in Phnom Penh—to which Britain has provided financial support—we will help to ensure the monitoring of progress.

Liberia

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what level of assistance is currently being made available to the people of Liberia; and by what means it is being distributed. [38104]

Mr. Hanley: Latest reports from the United Nations indicate an easing of the security situation throughout Liberia, enabling agencies such as the World Food Programme, Medecins Sans Frontieres and Caritas to allocate and distribute sufficient food and medical supplies to currently accessible areas of Monrovia and its environs, plus Montserrado, Margibi and Bong counties. Basic needs are being addressed.

Since May 1995, the UK has provided over £3.3 million in emergency relief to Liberia through non-governmental organisations, UN agencies and the International Federation of the Red Cross.

West Bank and Gaza Strip

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance he has given to date to help Palestinians on the west bank and the Gaza strip. [36781]

Mr. Hanley: Since the signing of the declaration of principles on 13 September 1993, total British bilateral assistance for the west bank and Gaza is estimated at £12 million. Additionally, we are providing one sixth of the EC's 500 mecu—£417 million—programme over five years and contributing to the support of Palestinian refugees through the EC and by directly contributing £6 million annually to the UN Relief and Works Agency.

WALES

Banned Animal Feeds

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how his Department plans to enforce legislation making it illegal for farmers to have outstanding stocks of banned feed on their premises; when that legislation comes into force; and if he will make a statement. [37357]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 19 July, *Official Report*, column *699-700*.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each occasion in the last two months in which his Department has consulted farmers directly about policy development concerning BSE and the beef crisis; and if he will make a statement. [37364]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: We have issued consultation documents to the farming unions on the following policy developments in the last two months:

3 May 1996: Mature beef assurance scheme.

6 June 1996: Proposals for compulsory cattle passports.

7 June 1996: Specified bovine material controls in abattoirs.

10 June 1996: Mammalian meat and bonemeal (MBM) legislation and MBM feed recall scheme.

12 June 1996: The fresh meat (Beef controls) Regulations 1996.

3 July 1996: BSE: accelerated slaughter proposals.

Welsh Office Ministers and officials have met farmers and their representatives on numerous occasions to hear their views on these and other issues.

Post-16 Education

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of those remaining in full-time post-16 education were last year in *(a)* further education colleges, *(b)* tertiary colleges and *(c)* school, (i) in Wales and (ii) in each county. [37554]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is in the following table:

Proportion of 16-18 Year Olds remaining in Full-time Education in Wales at Further Education Colleges or Schools, 1994–95[1]

	Further Education Colleges[2]	*Schools*[3]
Local Education Authority		
Clwyd	54	43
Dyfed	37	45
Gwent	53	44
Gwynedd	47	37
Mid Glamorgan	37	51
Powys	38	62
South Glamorgan	34	36
West Glamorgan	63	20
Wales	45	40

Source:
Further Education Student Record, Higher Education Statistics Agency and Schools Census.

Notes:
[1] Ages as at 31 August 1994. Counties current at time of survey. Excludes students aged 16 to 18 on courses at higher education colleges (15 per cent. of 16 to 18 year olds in full-time education in 1994–95).
[2] Provisional. Includes a small number of students on higher education courses at further education colleges. Includes further education colleges formerly designated as tertiary. At November 1994.
[3] Includes all maintained and independent schools. At January 1995.

Examination Results

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the relative public examination results performance of *(a)* grant-maintained and *(b)* locally managed schools. [38882]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: School performance tables covering the results of grant and locally maintained schools are published annually. The record of the former is pleasing: for example in 1994–5, 46 per cent. of 15-year-olds achieved five GCSE A*C, compared with 40 per cent. in locally maintained secondary schools.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his oral answer of 15 July to the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, (Mr. Rowlands) *Official Report*, column 776, what are the private finance initiatives which will allow his Department to make greater investments in education. [38885]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: We have announced radical measures to help local authorities harness private sector finance and management expertise and I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) on 21 May 1996 by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State for the Environment, *Official Report*, column *164*.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each project currently under consideration through the private finance initiative, indicating the value in each case. [38874]

Mr. Jones: Projects being looked at currently by the Welsh Office, which have been made public, and their estimated capital value are as follows:

A55 Anglesey (£125 million); M4 relief road (£375 million); A465 heads of the valleys road (£175 million); Easter Bay link of the Cardiff peripheral distributor road (£108 million); Bute avenue, Cardiff (£50 million); North Meirionnydd/East Dwyfor community hospital (£7 million); University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff (£21 million); staff residential accommodation, district general hospital, Llantrisant (£4.5 million); day surgery unit, Nevill hall, Abergavenny (£1.8 million); mental health development, Nevill hall, Abergavenny (£6 million); community hospital, Chepstow (£5 million); replacement of radiotherapy equipment, Velindre (£4 million); new general hospital at Baglan (£63 million).

Information on schemes costing less than £1 million is not collected.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children had statements of special educational need in each of the old county councils at the date of their abolition. [38875]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The available information is as follows:

Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs under section 168 of the Education Act 1993 at 16 January 1996[1].

LEA	*January 1996*
Clwyd	2,732
Dyfed	2,454
Gwent	[1]2,475
Gwynedd	[1]1,087
Mid Glamorgan	1,721
Powys	733
South Glamorgan	1,967
West Glamorgan	1,886

[1] The figures shown for Gwent and Gwynedd relate to January 1995.

Air Pollution

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each local authority the sampling sites for air pollution measurement, indicating at which sites the European Union guide levels have been exceeded; and what action has been recommended as a result. [38883]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Government air quality monitoring sites in Wales are as follows:

Local authority	*Site name*
Cardiff	Cardiff Centre
	Cardiff East
Ceredigion	Cwmystwyth
Flintshire	Shotton
Gwynedd	Waunfawr
Neath Port Talbot	Cwmgwrach
	Glyn Neath
	Port Talbot
Newport	Marshfield
	Newport
Pembrokeshire	Cresselly
Powys	Aston Hill
	Welshpool
Swansea	Swansea Centre
Torfaen	Pontypool
Wrexham	Wrexham

There are currently four European directives on air quality which set mandatory and non-mandatory limits for lead, sulphur dioxide and suspended particles, nitrogen dioxide and ozone levels in the air. The only exceedences of the relevant thresholds at Government sites in Wales in the last three years for which figures are available were as follows:

Limit	*Site*	*Number of exceedences (days)* 1992	1993	1994
Daily basis:				
Ozone information threshold	Aston Hill	3	1	1
	Cardiff Centre	2	—	1
Annual basis:				
Guide value for SO2	Cwmgwrach	Exc.	—	—
	Glyn Neath	Exc.	Exc.	Exc.
	Port Talbot	Exc.	—	—
Guide value for suspended particles	Wrexham	—	Exc.	—

Exc. = Exceeded the guide values, based on the average daily readings taken over the year.

Further information is available in the "Environment Digest for Wales" and the report "Air Pollution in the UK 1994", copies of which are in the Library of the House.

The Government will shortly be publishing a consultation draft of the national air quality strategy as required by the Environment Act 1995. It will include air quality standards and objectives and set out the measures required to meet those objectives.

The Environment Act 1995 also introduces a duty on local authorities to assess and review air quality in their areas, and to establish local air quality management areas where standards or objectives are being or likely to be breached. In such areas authorities must draw up action plans to help bring ambient pollution down to acceptable levels. The Government are currently developing guidance for local authorities sot help them discharge those duties.

School Improvement Index Initiative

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the schools which received awards under the voluntary school improvement index initiative; and if he will make a statement about the factors which were significant in accounting for their success. [38881]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The school improvement index is a Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales initiative sponsored by the Midland bank. It is part of our "Bright Future" programme which, among other things, encourages all schools in Wales to set targets for improved performance, year on year.

Awards are made on an area and national basis to those participating schools with the most improved GCSE results over the last three years. The award winners for 1995 were;

National

1st: most improved school 1995—

Aberdare girls' comprehensive school.

2nd: Tonypandy comprehensive school

Regional

North Wales—Eirias high school, Colwyn bay

South Wales—Aberdare girls' comprehensive school

South-East Wales—Bettws high school, Newport

South-west Wales—Ogmore comprehensive, Bridgend

Mid and West Wales—St. John Lloyd RC comprehensive, Llanelli

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money his Department contributed towards each of the projects which were successful in the closed circuit television competition; and what percentage this was of the total cost of each project. [38876]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The majority of funds for the closed circuit television competition were provided by the Home Office. From the Department, additional money was provided so that seven school-only bids, which would not otherwise have been successful, could also be funded.

Highways

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much in *(a)* cash *(b)* real terms each highway authority spent on (i) highway maintenance and (ii) road safety improvements. [38884]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on expenditure by local highway authorities is published each year by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in Highway and Transportation Statistics. Expenditure by my right hon. Friend on trunk roads in Wales is detailed in the Welsh Office departmental report (Cm 3215). Copies of these publications are available in the Library of the House.

Education and Training

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 16 July, *Official Report*, column *426*, if he will list those applications for education and training funds from the European Union of which he has been informed. [39018]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Food Strategy

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking to monitor the progress of a food strategy for Wales. [39333]

Mr. Hague: The food strategy advisory group which I set up in March will continue to meet on a regular basis in order to monitor the implementation of the strategy.

Planning Inspectorate

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what performance targets he has set for the Planning Inspectorate agency's work in Wales for the financial year 1996–97. [39334]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The key objectives for the agency in 1996–97 continue to be to preserve the impartiality and quality of the inspectorate's work while seeking further to improve its efficiency. I have set the following key targets for the agency's work in Wales, in particular the timeliness target has been extended to include the three different methods of hearing appeals:

Timeliness

(a) Eighty per cent. of all planning appeals decided by written representations to be determined within 17 weeks;

(b) Eighty per cent. of all planning appeals decided by hearings to be determined within 22 weeks;

(c) Eighty per cent. of all planning appeals decided by inquiries to be determined within 30 weeks;

(d) To provide an inspector for local plan inquiries on request within 26 weeks of the end of the objection period and to deliver 90 per cent. of inspectors' reports to local authorities by the dates agreed in service agreements;

Financial

(a) Unit costs of planning appeals decided by written representations not to exceed £690;

(b) Recover 90 per cent. of receipts due within eight weeks of the invoice date;

Efficiency

Contribute to the generation of a three per cent. efficiency improvement in the agency's use of running costs compared with 1995–96;

Quality

To satisfy the Advisory Panel on Standards and thus the Secretary of State, annually and following rigorous monitoring, that the quality of the inspectorate's work is being maintained at a high standard with 99 per cent. of its casework free from error;

Welsh Language

To respond in Welsh to all inquiries, written or oral, received in Welsh within the same timescales as allowed for responding to inquiries generally.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Millennium Exhibition

11. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column 10, on the millennium exhibition if he will make a statement on the outcome of his work with Sir Peter Levene. [36791]

The Deputy Prime Minister: Many leading companies have already pledged their support for the millennium exhibition. Sir Peter is continuing discussions with other interested concerns, and encouraging progress is being made.

Civil Servants

12. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many civil servants were employed by the Government and by Government agencies at the most recent count; and what was the figure in May 1979. [36792]

Mr. Willetts: In 1979, when we came to office, there were 735,000 civil servants. There are now 494,000: a fall of 33 per cent.

Deregulation

13. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what new proposals he has to reduce harmful effects arising from deregulation. [36793]

Mr. Freeman: I am satisfied that deregulation does not diminish necessary protection whether for consumers, employees, or the environment. The Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 includes safeguards to ensure that any necessary protection under existing legislation is maintained.

25. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the work undertaken by *(a)* the deregulation task force and *(b)* the deregulation unit in the last 12 months; and what has been the cost to the public purse of each. [36806]

Mr. Freeman: The deregulation task force's first report recorded its work up to September 1995 and its programme for the following 12 months. A copy is available in the House Library. The work of the deregulation unit is shown in the Cabinet Office departmental report published as Cm 3220 in March 1996. Direct expenditure, excluding overheads, for the deregulation task force and the deregulation unit for 1995–96 was £14,700 and £1,480,600 respectively.

Government Policy

15. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what have been the main changes he has made to the presentation of Government policy. [36795]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I chair the Ministerial Committee on the Co-ordination and Presentation of Government Policy. The committee considers all aspects of presentation and works to ensure that the Government take every opportunity to emphasise the benefits of their policies for the UK.

21. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what was the principal Government policy with which he was concerned in the week beginning 8 July. [36802]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have continued to work on a full range of those Government policies for which I am responsible.

New Policies

16. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what percentage of his Department's time is spent in developing new policies for other Departments of state. [36796]

Mr. Willetts: None. However, the work of the Office of Public Service impacts across all Government Departments because it promotes competitiveness, deregulation, improving standards in public services and greater efficiency and effectiveness throughout the civil service.

Policy Initiatives

17. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the three policy initiatives which will constitute his Department's priorities for the next six months. [36798]

Mr. Willetts: The priorities for the Office of Public Service will be to promote the competitiveness agenda, the deregulation initiative and the effective administration of the services for which the Department is responsible.

24. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the three policy initiatives to which his Department has devoted most resources since the creation of his office. [36805]

Mr. Willetts: The priorities for the Office of Public Service have been to promote the competitiveness agenda, the deregulation initiative and the effective administration of the services for which the Department is responsible.

Competitiveness

18. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures he is taking to promote competitiveness. [36799]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The wide range of measures we are taking to promote competitiveness are set out in the 1996 competitiveness White Paper published last month.

23. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proposals he has to help small businesses improve their competitiveness; and if he will make a statement. [36804]

Mr. Willetts: The wide range of measures we are taking to help small firms are set out in the 1996 competitiveness White Paper. The benefits of our approach are clear. More than a million new businesses have been created since 1979, and our small businesses are more optimistic than their European counterparts: 70 per cent. of UK businesses expect to increase turnover this year, compared with less than half on the continent.

28. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his latest assessments of the impact of his competitiveness campaign. [36810]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I believe that our annual analysis of the UK's competitive position, through the competitiveness White Papers, is now widely accepted, and having an increasing impact on national performance. The 1996 White Paper, published last month, has been widely welcomed by business, including the Confederation of British Industry, the Engineering Employers Federation and the Institute of Directors.

Private Finance Initiative

19. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minster if he will make a statement on his responsibilities in respect of the promotion of the private finance initiative. [36800]

Mr. Freeman: The central IT unit, which reports to me, is responsible for advising Departments, HM Treasury and agencies on the best application of the private finance initiative in the provision of information technology-based services.

Small Businesses

20. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a further statement on the measures he is taking to deregulate the activities of small businesses. [36790]

Mr. Freeman: We are pressing ahead with the package of new measures for small business announced at the "Your Business Matters" conference on 11 March. These include a draft Bill on industrial tribunals, a single notification point for tax and national insurance, and new rights for business in enforcement actions.

Food Industry

22. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent steps he has taken to improve the presentation of Government policy in so far as it affects the food industry. [36803]

Mr. Freeman: On 5 June, my hon. Friends the Parliamentary Secretary and the MAFF deregulation Minister hosted a food and drink seminar in Leeds for business and enforcement officers. Delegates supported our goal of fewer, better, simpler regulations which ensure consumer safety and choice while strengthening the competitiveness of the food and drink industries.

Information Technology

26. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his responsibilities in respect of information technology policy. [36807]

Mr. Freeman: I am responsible for the work of the central IT unit, the principal task of which is to advise Ministers on the development of an IT strategy for improving the internal efficiency of government and the delivery of public services. It is also responsible for advising Departments and agencies on the application of the private finance initiative to information systems and information systems and information technology projects.

Performance-related Pay

27. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the use of performance-related pay in his Department. [36809]

Mr. Willetts: For this purpose, the Deputy Prime Minister's office forms part of the Cabinet Office.

The White Paper "The Civil Service: Continuity and Change", published in 1994, set out the Government's intention to proceed with comprehensive pay delegation from 1 April 1996. Since then, the Cabinet Office has been adhering to the principles set out in the White Paper for its own staff—that there should be a clear link between an individual's pay and their contribution to the achievement of the Department's objectives.

European Union

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts on co-ordinating Government policy initiatives between member states. [36794]

Mr. Freeman: During the past year, I have had regular contact with the Commission and with Ministers in other member states pressing the case for fewer, better and simpler regulations in Europe. Progress to date includes the SLIM—simpler legislation in the internal market—initiative to review and simplify areas of existing legislation, and a recently agreed Council resolution to help ensure that future rules from Brussels are proportionate, goal-based and small firm friendly.

Appeals Mechanisms

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many appeals mechanisms in accordance with statutory instrument 1678 he expects to incorporate into new and existing legislation by 1 January 1997. [38408]

Mr. Freeman: The model appeals mechanism will be considered for all appeals against enforcement action in appropriate legislation put before the House before January 1997, and thereafter. The recently enacted Chemical Weapons Act 1996 contains provision which will allow the appeals mechanism to be utilised for enforcement.

SCOTLAND

Obesity

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the estimated percentage of *(a)* men and *(b)* women, aged (i) 16 to 64 years and (ii) 64 years and over, who were obese for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [37368]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not available for all the years and age groups requested. Such data on obesity in Scotland as are currently held are given in the following table.

Physical measurements, including obesity, are included in the current Scottish health survey and the resultant data will be published in the first report, which is expected in spring 1997.

Longitudinal body mass index data for adolescents and adults in Scotland showing percentage in each BMI category

Age	*Year*	*Number assessed*	*<20 Under-weight*	*20-24.9 Normal*	*25-29.9 Overweight*	*<30 Obese*
Adolescents						
Boys						
15	1987	462	50.9	43.1	5.2	0.9
18	1990	422	19.2	64.2	14.5	2.1
Girls						
15	1987	494	38.7	51.2	8.5	1.6
18	1990	470	22.3	55.3	16.4	5.7

Longitudinal body mass index data for adolescents and adults in Scotland showing percentage in each BMI category

Age	Year	Number assessed	<20 Under-weight	20-24.9 Normal	25-29.9 Overweight	<30 Obese
Adults						
Men						
35	1988	420	6.4	43.3	41.7	8.6
40–59	1985	4,676	3.2	36.5	49.5	10.8
45–69	1989	115	3.5	42.6	46.0	7.8
55	1988	396	3.8	34.1	51.5	10.6
55–75	1988	808	3.3	40.6	48.3	7.8
Women						
35	1988	516	12.0	56.4	22.1	9.5
40–59	1985	4,225	6.1	49.0	32.4	12.4
45–69	1989	127	4.7	44.0	27.5	23.6
55	1988	528	5.3	44.1	33.1	17.4
55–75	1988	782	5.9	44.6	33.5	16.0

Banned Animal Feeds

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how his Department plans to enforce legislation making it illegal for farmers to have outstanding stocks of banned feed on their premises; when that legislation comes into force; and if he will make a statement. [37356]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 19 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *699*.

NHS Staff

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the overall cost of management staff and administrative staff in the NHS in Scotland in *(a)* 1989–90 *(b)* 1995–96. [37372]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The overall cost of management staff and administrative staff in the NHS in Scotland in *(a)* 1989–90 was £130,055 million and *(b)* 1994–95 was £255,732 million. The figures for 1995–96 are not currently available. The expenditure shown for 1994–95 includes senior nurses and clinicians who have transferred to the general/senior mangers' pay scales.

Abortions

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of States for Scotland if he will give a breakdown, by procedure, of the number of abortions performed in Scotland in the latest year for which figures are available. [37553]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The provisional number of abortions performed in Scotland in 1995 was 11,136. Of these, 7,868 were performed using surgical methods, 3,266 using medical methods and two cases had no method recorded.

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many abortions have been performed in Scotland under the provisions of the Abortion Act 1967; and how many and what percentage of these abortions were performed in emergency to save the life of the mother. [37562]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of abortions performed in Scotland between 1968 and 1995 was 233,805 including provisional figures for the last year. During this period 17 abortions—0.007 per cent. were performed in emergency to save the life of the woman.

Queen Margaret Hospital, Dunfermline

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many readmissions to the Queen Margaret hospital in Dunfermline there have been over the last three years. [37847]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The total number of patients readmitted within 28 days of discharge from Queen Margaret hospital for the only two available years is given in the table. The reason for a patient being readmitted is not necessarily related to the reason for original admission. The longer after discharge that a patient is readmitted, the less likely it is that the reasons are related.

Period[2]	Total readmissions within[1] 28 days of discharge
April 1993–March 1994	2,105
April 1994–March 1995	2,880

[1] Includes both planned and emergency readmission with any diagnosis at any hospital in Scotland.
[2] Hospital officially opened 28 June 1993 with first patients admitted in April 1993.

Missionaries

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements are in place for grants to be provided for university education for the children of missionaries who have been working abroad. [37968]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: In Scotland, the provision of student grants for full-time courses of higher education up to first degree or equivalent level is governed by the Students' Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 1991. To be eligible for an award, a student must normally have been ordinarily resident in the British Islands for at least three years immediately preceding the academic year in which the course starts; and also be ordinarily resident in Scotland on 30 June of that year.

In the case of children whose parents are employed outside the British islands, including those employed as missionaries, eligibility would depend on the nature of the

parents' absence. A student may be considered for a fees and maintenance award if the absence can be clearly demonstrated to be temporary, by way of fixed-term contracts, continuing links with the UK, and a clear intention at the outset to return to the UK at the end of the contract or contracts. The temporary absence provision is not specifically defined in terms of time and each case is decided on its merits.

There is also provision for a student to be considered for a full award where the parents have returned from employment in the European economic area and are resident in Scotland on the relevant date. Where the parents continue to be ordinarily resident in the European economic area at that time, the student may be considered for an award of tuition fees only.

Fife Health Board

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent by the Fife health board in the financial year 1995–96 on *(a)* tendering for services, *(b)* tendering for the north-east Fife services and *(c)* administrating the general practitioner fundholding scheme within the health board. [37863]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The additional costs incurred in 1995–96 by Fife health board on tendering for services in north-east Fife and for other services were around £4,000 and £1,100 respectively.

The work involved in any tendering process and in administering the general practitioner fundholding scheme is regarded as part of the normal duties of relevant staff in Fife health board and no additional staff were employed specifically for this work.

Glasgow Boundaries Act

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if section 43 of the Glasgow Boundaries Act 1912 is still in force. [37973]

Mr. Kynoch: No.

Sport and Physical Recreation

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish the national planning policy guidelines on sport and physical recreation; and what changes are proposed to the section on open space in the draft document published in August 1995. [37075]

Mr. Kynoch: Following wide-ranging consultation last year on draft guidance, on 27 June 1996 the Government published national planning policy guideline (NPPG) No. 11: "Sport, Physical Recreation and Open Space". Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Wind Farms

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about plans to develop wind farms at West Garty and Gartymore in Sutherland; and if he will make a statement. [37727]

Mr. Kynoch: To date, my right hon. Friend has received a total of 613 letters of which 440 are opposed to the development. The applications for planning permission have now been notified to my right hon. Friend. He will consider these and decide whether they should be called in for his own determination.

Shared Parenting

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the effect of the recent legal decision on the principle of maternal preference relating to the custody of children on shared parenting as provided for by the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. [37869]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The provisions in part I of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 are not due to come into force until 1 November of this year. Accordingly, it is not known what attitude the courts will take to the existing case law on custody of children when deciding whether or not to make an order under section 11(2)(c) of the 1995 Act regulating the arrangements as to the persons with whom a child is to live. Under the present law, and under the provisions of the 1995 Act, the court is required to regard the welfare of the child as its paramount consideration.

Local Government Finance

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) pursuant to the letter from Mr. N. D. MacLennan of the Scottish Office development department to Mr. Alan Patterson, of the Wishaw Business Group dated 3 July, under what powers central Government bears three quarters of the cost of relief from rates on grounds of hardship granted by rating authorities under section 156 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994; and what has been the cost to central Government of doing so; [38577]

(2) which rating authorities have used their powers to remit payment of rates on grounds of hardship under section 156 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994; [38579]

(3) what steps have been taken to inform small businesses and rating authorities of the powers under section 156 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994 to grant remission from non-domestic rates on grounds of hardship. [38578]

Mr. Kynoch: The cost of any relief borne by local authorities under section 156 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 is borne in the ratio 25:75, by local authorities and central Government respectively, in accordance with regulations made under schedule 12 to the Local Government Finance Act 1992. Figures are not yet available on the cost to central Government or the numbers of authorities granting relief under this provision which was introduced with effect from 1 April 1995. All local authorities were informed of the commencement of this provision by circular on 12 January 1995.

Speeding Fines

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate for the last financial year for each of the police forces in Scotland *(a)* the total amount raised through the payment of fixed penalties for speeding, *(b)* the total of fixed penalty fines for speeding levied and *(c)* the average amount levied for each speeding fine. [38646]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In the last financial year, the total number of fixed penalty fines levied for speeding were:

	Number
Central Scotland police	4,205
Dumfries and Galloway constabulary	3,478
Fife constabulary	3,113
Grampian police	5,871
Lothian and Borders police	[1]12,768
Northern constabulary	3,582
Strathclyde police	31,494
Tayside police	5,276
Total	69,787

[1] January 1995–December 1995.

The value of each fixed penalty fine was £40 but the total amount raised is not readily available since the calculation is affected by a number of fines which could not be collected.

The average amount levied for each speeding fine is not readily available. Speeding fines are often levied along with fines for other offences such as reckless driving and are not readily separately identifiable.

Vehicle Damage (Police)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will indicate for the financial years *(a)* 1991–92 and *(b)* 1995–96 for each of Scotland's police forces the amount paid out in insurance claims against these bodies in respect of damage to vehicles; [38648]

(2) if he will indicate for the financial years *(a)* 1991–92 and *(b)* 1995–96 for each of Scotland's police forces the number of claims against vehicle insurance lodged against the police giving the total number of police vehicles insured during each of these periods. [38647]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Health Boards and NHS Trusts

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when *(a)* health boards and *(b)* NHS trusts in Scotland will be in a position to publish their annual reports and accounts; and what instructions these bodies have been given about the time scale for publication of these documents. [38649]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Health boards are required to publish their annual reports by the end of October, and to include specific financial information in these reports. It is for each NHS trust to determine the timetable for publication of its annual report and accounts, but there is a statutory requirement on them to hold a public meeting to present audited accounts and annual reports not later than six months after their respective accounting dates.

Operations (Waiting Times)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the current median waiting periods for patients needing *(a)* hip replacements and *(b)* cataract treatment at (i) each hospital where this operation is provided and (ii) in Scotland indicating the equivalent waiting times for the two preceding years. [37495]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 July 1996]:* The information requested is in the table:

Hospital of treatment	*Total hip replacement*			*Cataract operations*		
	Median wait (days) 1993	*Median wait (days) 1994*	*1995*[1]	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*[1]
Aberdeen Royal Infirmary	—	—	—	53	46	65
Albyn Hospital	—	—	24	—	—	—
Ayr Hospital	95	75	65	207	197	153
Borders General Hospital	57	66	72	43	77	174
Bridge of Earn Hospital	65	—	—	—	—	—
City Hospital	—	—	70	—	—	—
Crosshouse Hospital	57	64	69	—	—	—
Dr. Gray's Hospital	—	—	—	78	79	73
Dumfries and Galloway Infirmary	197	255	183	194	136	121
Dundee Royal Infirmary	71	93	90	—	—	—
Dumfermline and West Fife Hospital	75	—	—	—	—	—
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary	87	71	198	—	—	—
Gartnavel General Hospital	110	—	—	27	—	—
Gilbert Bain Memorial Hospital	—	—	—	150	75	58
Glasgow Royal Infirmary	93	159	150	—	—	—
Glasgow Western Infirmary	120	133	134	49	45	54
Hairmyres Hospital	49	43	74	—	—	—
Inverclyde Royal Hospital	78	110	106	164	148	208
Kings Cross Hospital	17	—	—	—	—	—
Law Hospital	194	180	210	—	—	—
Monklands District General Hospital	89	111	67	—	—	—
Ninewells Hospital	—	—	—	67	50	55
Perth Royal Infirmary	98	126	94	—	—	—
Princess Margaret Rose Hospital	101	133	143	—	—	—
Queen Margaret Hospital, Dunfermline	72	12	90	80	65	55

Hospital of treatment	Total hip replacement Median wait (days) 1993	Median wait (days) 1994	1995[1]	Cataract operations 1993	1994	1995[1]
Raigmore Hospital	121	138	178	123	116	126
Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital	—	—	—	73	27	5
Royal Alexandra Hospital	59	69	77	62	82	84
Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Yorkhill	—	—	—	39	50	21
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh	12	14	17	191	105	94
Southern General Hospital	95	64	93	304	293	188
St. John's Hospital	78	24	7	345	9	26
Stirling Royal Infirmary	133	187	196	99	102	91
Stobhill Hospital	56	62	74	92	137	199
Stonehouse Hospital	106	101	120	129	138	146
Stracathro Hospital	51	50	76	—	—	—
Victoria Hospital	117	124	98	79	—	—
Victoria Infirmary	99	153	141	—	—	—
Western Isles Hospital	21	40	67	—	—	—
Woodend General Hospital	66	71	63	—	—	—
Scotland	88	103	99	90	86	88

[1] Provisional data. — No relevant operations performed.

Asbestos (East Kilbride)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the current legal action being taken against the former East Kilbride development corporation by residents of the Telford road area on the question of liability for the removal of asbestos from their properties. [38448]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 19 July 1996]:* It would be inappropriate for my right hon. Friend to comment while the matter is before the courts.

Acute Beds

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each health board in Scotland the number of acute beds for each of the last five years and the projected number for 2000. [38398]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 July 1996]:* The total number of average available staffed acute beds for each health board for each of the last five years is given in the table. There is no central projection for the number of acute beds in the year 2000. It is for health boards and NHS trusts to determine the number of beds required to deliver services taking into account their own local circumstances.

Average available staffed beds in Acute Specialties[1]

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996[2]
Argyll and Clyde	1,286	1,248	1,204	1,188	1,140
Ayrshire and Arran	1,152	1,136	1,107	1,075	971
Borders	354	354	348	335	338
Dumfries and Galloway	435	419	406	405	416
Fife	851	800	791	774	754
Forth Valley	605	600	588	592	573
Grampian	1,640	1,918	1,885	1,843	1,804
Greater Glasgow	4,194	4,036	3,899	3,651	3,581
Highland	740	743	729	724	796
Lanarkshire	1,665	1,632	1,592	1,550	1,526
Lothian	2,659	2,577	2,455	2,397	2,298
Orkney	62	62	97	91	85
Shetland	49	46	46	46	46
Tayside	1,801	1,748	1,622	1,589	1,540
Western Isles	85	97	103	100	95
Scotland	17,580	17,414	16,873	16,360	15,963

[1] Includes Acute, Supra-area and Special categories specialty groups. Excludes obstetrics.
[2] Provisional.

NHS Waiting Lists

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when NHS waiting list figures for March 1996 will become available in *(a)* unpublished form and *(b)* published form; [38400]

(2) when NHS waiting list figures for March 1995 *(a)* became available in unpublished form and *(b)* were published; [38397]

(3) when NHS list figures for September 1995 *(a)* became available in unpublished form and *(b)* will be published. [38399]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 July 1996]:* Waiting list figures as at 31 March are published annually in December by the information and statistics division of the Common Services agency of the national health service in Scotland in "Scottish Health Statistics". Information on waiting list figures at other dates is held by the information and statistics division of the Common Services agency, but is not routinely published.

Student Awards

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provisions apply to the payment by local authorities in Scotland of awards to students equivalent to education maintenance allowances paid by local authorities in England and Wales; if he will list those local education authorities in Scotland which pay such awards;

how much is currently paid by each; if he will list the practice of each authority as to when the allowance is paid; and if he will make a statement. [38446]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 19 July 1996]:* The equivalent of education allowances in Scotland are higher school bursaries. All the education authorities in Scotland have the power to offer these bursaries, and to determine the circumstances in which they will do so. Details of the policies and expenditure of individual authorities are not held centrally.

Summary Case Costs

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what instructions he issued regarding the timing of the comparative research into summary case costs in different jurisdictions, referred to in paragraph 6.12.3 of the White Paper "Crime and Punishment"; who conducted the research; when the research was completed; and when he proposes to publish it. [38442]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 July 1996]:* The research was conducted by Ms T. Goriely of TPR Social and Legal Research and Professor A. Paterson and Mr. C. Tata of the University of Strathclyde law school. The contract required the first draft of the research report to be provided to the funding bodies—that is, the Scottish Office, the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Scottish Legal Aid board—by 30 April 1996. The draft report was provided on time and it is intended that, following further work, a short research findings summary will be issued towards the end of 1996.

HEALTH

Mentally Handicapped Children

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of mentally handicapped children currently in NHS hospital care in *(a)* the north-west and *(b)* nationally. [36262]

Mr. Bowis: The table gives the number of children resident in national health service hospitals and units and under the care of a mental handicap consultant at 31 March 1995.

	Age at 31 March 1995[1]	
	0–14	*15–19*
North Western and Mersey[2]	10	20
England	120	190

The figures are estimates based on a combination of data from the hospital episode statistics system and data obtained directly from regional offices (and the former RHAs) and are rounded to the nearest 10.

[1] Estimates of those in hospital under the care of a learning disability consultant.

[2] All health authorities under North Western and Mersey regional health authorities including South Cumbria merged to form North West regional office.

Junior Doctors

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that junior doctors gain clinical experience at specialist locations and district general hospitals with particular reference to *(a)* accident and emergency, *(b)* paediatrics and *(c)* maternity departments; and if he will make a statement. [37178]

Mr. Malone: The content of postgraduate medical training programmes, taking into account the needs of individual trainees, is the responsibility of the relevant royal college or faculty and the postgraduate deans. Opportunities exist to gain clinical experience in the specialties referred to in most district general hospitals.

Tranquillisers and Anti-depressants

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total cost and the cost per head of population of expenditure within the GP prescribing scheme for *(a)* tranquillisers and *(b)* anti-depressants for each health district in England and Wales for the year 1995–96. [37565]

Mr. Malone: The available information will be placed in the Library. Questions relating to Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Private Nursing Homes

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when was the most recent review of registration and inspection of privately run nursing homes. [37860]

Mr. Bowis: The review of the regulation and inspection of social services, launched in September 1995, covers the regulation and inspection of nursing homes which provide care of a kind which local authorities may be required to arrange under their community care responsibilities.

Contract Settlements

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the principles used by each NHS region in its arbitration process on contract settlements between NHS purchasers and providers; and what measures are taken by the NHS executive to ensure that these principles are consistent between regions. [38032]

Mr. Malone: Guidance on the resolution of disputes and setting out the principles for arbitration was issued in March 1991 as EL(91)11 and copies were placed in the Library.

DIY-related Accidents

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people *(a)* in total and *(b)* over the age of 50 years have been injured in do-it-yourself-related accidents in each of the last five years. [37897]

Mr. Horam: The data requested are contained in the Department of Trade and Industry's consumer safety unit "Annual Report on Home and Leisure Safety Research; Home Accident Surveillance System Monitoring Product Safety" reports, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost to the NHS of treating people injured in do-it-yourself-related accidents in each of the last five years. [37896]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available.

Bed Blocking (Geriatric Wards)

Sir Michael Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make an assessment of the extent of bed blocking in geriatric wards of NHS hospitals caused by patients being unable to obtain places in extra care homes run by charitable organisations, with particular reference to the Abbeyfield Society; if he will initiate discussions with the Secretary of State for Social Security to obtain authorisation for the provision of beds in registered extra care homes; and if he will make a statement. [37902]

Mr. Bowis: It is for health and local authorities to make an assessment of any factors affecting delayed hospital discharges locally.

Abortion

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the statistically most likely candidate for an abortion within the Anglia and Oxford region after the 24th week of pregnancy in the latest year for which figures are available in terms of *(a)* the age of the woman, *(b)* marital status of the woman, *(c)* the number of previous children of the woman and *(d)* the grounds on which the abortion is performed. [38028]

Mr. Horam: The statistically most likely candidate for an abortion for each of the variables listed is the category with the highest recorded frequency of legal terminations. The percentages are based on all legal terminations in the Anglia and Oxford region in 1993.

The categories with the highest frequencies found in each of the variables were:

age of the woman 30 to 34 age group comprised 46 per cent. 6 of all post-24th week gestation terminations;

marital status of the woman; married women comprised 85 per cent. 11 of all post-24th week gestation terminations;

number of previous children of the woman; women with no previous live and still born children comprised 53.8 per cent. of (7) of all post-24th week gestation terminations; and

legal grounds under the abortion is performed; statutory ground E alone comprised 100 per cent. (13) of all post-24th week gestation terminations. Ground E is defined as meaning that there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped.

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the statistically most likely candidate for an abortion within the Anglia and Oxford region in the latest year for which figures are available in terms of *(a)* the age of the woman, *(b)* marital status of the woman, *(c)* the number of previous children of the woman and *(d)* the grounds on which the abortion is performed. [38027]

Mr. Horam: The statistically most likely candidate for an abortion for each of the variables listed is the category with the highest recorded frequency of legal terminations. The percentages are based on all legal terminations in the Anglia and Oxford region in 1993.

The categories with the highest frequencies found in each of the variables were:

age of the woman: 20 to 24 age group comprised 28.7 per cent. (3,397) of all terminations;

marital status of the woman: single women comprised 62.2 per cent. (7,356) of all terminations;

number of previous children of the woman: women with no previous live and still born children comprised 54.8 per cent. (6,483) of all terminations;

legal grounds under which the abortion is performed: statutory ground C alone comprised 91.5 per cent. (10,821) of terminations. Ground C is defined as meaning that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated, of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman.

Disciplinary Hearings (Northern Region)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list (i) the number of *(a)* medical and *(b)* nursing staff suspended or dismissed at each NHS trust in the Northern region since 1 January 1993 and (ii) the number of staff in each category heard by disciplinary hearings of trusts who were not so suspended or dismissed in this period. [38160]

Mr. Horam: Such information on nursing staff is not available centrally. The information available is set out.

Decisions on employment matters rests with the employing authority or national health service trust. Since 31 March 1995, national health service employers have reported cases of suspension of hospital and community medical and dental staff lasting more than six months. Information is, therefore, available only on those cases of suspension over six months and from that date.

In the Northern and Yorkshire region only one such case of suspension was reported for medical and dental staff between 31 March 1995 and 20 June 1996.

Dental Health (Morecambe Bay)

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what number of teeth affected by decay in five-year-old children and what number of decayed, missing and filled teeth in 14-year-old children are found in the Morecambe Bay health authority's area; what is the national average for five and 14-year olds; and what changes, using the model of South Cheshire where fluorine is added to the water, he would expect to find in Morecambe Bay if water was similarly treated. [38223]

Mr. Malone: Every two years, the British Association for the study of community dentistry conducts a survey of dental caries prevalence in children aged five throughout Great Britain, and every four years for 14-year-olds. The 1993–94 figures for five-year-olds' dental caries experience, and 1994–95 figures for 14-year-olds in the Morecambe Bay health authority show mean values for decayed, missing and filled teeth for five and 14-year-olds to be 2.28 and 2.22 respectively. The comparative five and 14-year-old figures for England are 1.74 and 1.67 respectively. Studies have consistently shown that the prevalence of dental decay in fluoridated areas is between one third to one half lower than in comparable non-fluoridated water areas.

Doncaster Family Health Services Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the payments made to Mr. Ray Hemming on the termination of his employment as chief executive of Doncaster FHSA. [38392]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 27 November, *Official Report,* column *519.*

Psychiatric Patients

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he collates about the number of patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 who go absent without leave from psychiatric hospitals. [38437]

Mr. Bowis: This Department collates no such information centrally.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many psychiatric patients were admitted *(a)* compulsorily and *(b)* voluntarily to (i) NHS and (ii) private hospitals in each of the last five years. [38438]

Mr. Bowis: The information available is set out in the tables. Information is not available centrally on admissions to private hospitals.

Formal admissions to national health service facilities of patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 and other legislation[1]

England

Year	*Numbers*[2]
1990–91	18,500
1991–92	21,100
1992–93	22,100
1993–94[3]	24,000
1994–95	26,300

Source:
KH15.
Special Hospitals Service Authority.
Notes:
[1] Figures refer to the financial year.
[2] Figures rounded to the nearest hundred.
[3] Admission figures includes estimated data from East Anglian regional health authority.

Mental Illness: All admissions, including formal admissions to NHS hospitals[1]

England

Year	*Numbers*[2]
1990–91	185,500
1991–92	192,500
1992–93	212,800
1993–94	224,200
1994–95[3]	214,000

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics.
Notes:
[1] Figures refer to the financial year.
[2] Figures rounded to the nearest hundred.
[3] Provisional figures.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by health authority the number of short and long-stay beds in *(a)* NHS local psychiatric hospitals and units and *(b)* water tower mental hospitals in England, between 1982 and 1995. [38436]

Mr. Bowis: Information is not available centrally in the form requested. The number of short-stay and long-stay mental illness beds is contained in "Bed availability for England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Casualty Departments

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy that nurses are not hired solely to greet patients within five minutes of arrival in casualty departments. [38321]

Mr. Horam: The patients charter states that patients going to an accident and emergency department can expect to be seen immediately and have their need for treatment assessed. In the period January to April 1996, 94 per cent. of such patients were assessed within five minutes. This patients charter standard has resulted in improved standards of practice and patient satisfaction. However, many clinicians would like this standard to be refined to fit more closely with clinical practice and a revised standard is being developed after consultation with the national health service.

Health Care

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to discuss with his Austrian counterpart the health care from Austrian Gemeindeartz for British holidaymakers; and if he will make a statement. [38325]

Mr. Malone: Details of the way in which the reciprocal health care arrangements with Austria operate, including general practitioner services, are contained in leaflet T5 "Health advice for travellers", which is available from post offices. Copies of this leaflet are available in the Library. These arrangements generally work well and Ministers have no plans to discuss them with Austrian counterparts.

Crisis Accommodation

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answers to the hon. member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) of 18 March and 24 April, *Official Report*, columns *79* and *172*, what factors led to the omission from guidance in LASSL (96) 16/HSG (96) 6 of references to crisis accommodation; and if he will make a statement. [38493]

Mr. Bowis: A clear and explicit reference to crisis accommodation is made in "The Spectrum of Care" which was issued under cover of health service guidelines LASSL(96)16/HSG(96)6, copies of which are available in the Library.

Health Authority Overspends

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State of Health how many health service commissioner authorities in England *(a)* have had previous years' overspends written off and *(b)* been given additional funding to compensate for previous overspends; and if he will make a statement. [38439]

Mr. Horam: This information is not held centrally.

Clinical Waste

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *319*, what progress has been made in tracing the illegally dumped clinical waste; and if he will make a statement. [38237]

Mr. Horam: Following action by the relevant waste regulation authorities to trace the producers of the clinical waste dumped in Hertfordshire, two summonses have been issued and further summonses are likely. Investigations by the Hertfordshire police fraud squad and Environment Agency continue.

Safety Glass (Licensed Premises)

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the potential savings to accident and emergency and surgical departments if toughened safety glass were to be introduced across the licensed victuallers' trade. [38322]

Mr. Horam: None.

Water Tower Mental Hospitals

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 June, *Official Report*, column *111*, when he expects the national survey by the NHS executive of the water tower mental hospitals in England to be completed; and if it will be published. [38433]

Mr. Bowis: The survey by the national health service executive of the water tower mental hospitals in England should be completed around the end of October 1996. A decision on publication will be taken nearer the time.

Medical Devices Agency

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the annual report and accounts for the Medical Devices Agency. [38993]

Mr. Horam: I have received the report and accounts which has today been laid before both Houses of Parliament in accordance with the requirements of sections 5(2) and 5(3) of the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1921. Copies have also been placed in the Library.

Winter Mortality Rates

Sir Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the excess winter mortality rates over average annual mortality rates, have been for each of the last 10 years expressed *(a)* in numbers and *(b)* as percentages. [37997]

Mr. Bowis: The available information is shown in the table.

Excess Winter Mortality, England and Wales

Period	*Excess winter deaths*	*Excess winter death index*[1]
1985–86	49,446	27.7
1986–87	26,449	14.9
1987–88	33,089	18.4
1988–89	21,235	11.8
1989–90	47,083	26.3
1990–91	37,845	21.5
1991–92	24,845	19.9
1992–93	25,656	14.5
1993–94	25,890	14.2
1994–95	27,512	15.6

Source:

Office for National Statistics.

Note:

[1] The excess winter death Index is the number of excess winter deaths expressed as a percentage of the average of the number of deaths in the autumn and summer periods.

Hepatitis

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the incidence in the United Kingdom of *(a)* hepatitis B and *(b)* haemophilus influenzae type B—Hib—meningitis (i) at the time of the introduction of Hib vaccination to the immunisation schedule, (ii) in each of the five years before that introduction and (iii) at the latest available date. [38465]

Mr. Horam: Haemophilus influenzae type B vaccine was introduced into the United Kingdom childhood immunisation programme in October 1992. Comparable and complete information for the periods specified is available only for England and Wales. This information is in the table.

Laboratory reports for England and Wales to the public health laboratory service[1]

Year	*Bacteraemia and meningitis of Haemophilus influenzae type B*	*Hepatitis B*
1987	n/a	785
1988	n/a	641
1989	655	583
1990	658	618
1991	667	572
1992	627	531
1995	[2]39	[2]612

[1] Laboratory reports are made to the public health laboratory service under a voluntary and confidential reporting system.
[2] Provisional.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy on the World Health Organisation's recommendation on the integration of hepatitis B into national vaccination programmes by 1997; and if he will make a statement. [38486]

Mr. Horam: The Department's current policy is to recommend immunisation against hepatitis B for those groups at increased risk of infection because of their life style, occupation or other factors such as close contact with a case or carrier. This policy, including the risk groups for whom immunisation is recommended, is kept under review.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of health authorities screened pregnant women for hepatitis B in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [38460]

Mr. Horam: The public health laboratory service carried out a survey of English and Welsh district health authorities' hepatitis B ante-natal screening policies in September 1991. In England, there was a response rate of 81 per cent. All the health authorities responding carried out ante-natal screening for hepatitis B. Seventy-seven per cent. of those which responded had a selective screening policy, 21 per cent. had a universal screening policy and 2 per cent. had a mixed policy of selective and universal screening depending on the individual screening centre.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which *(a)* EU and *(b)* Group of Seven member countries have introduced national policies for routine vaccination of (i) infants and (ii) adolescents against hepatitis B; and if he will rank them according to the prevalence of hepatitis B, with rates of incidence. [38471]

Mr. Horam: Member states are asked to report the number of cases of certain infectious disease to the World Health Organisation European regional office. These include cases of acute hepatitis B. It should be noted that methods of surveillance, case definitions and completeness of reporting vary between European member states and that caution should be observed when making comparisons. The WHO European office does not hold data of the seroprevalence of chronic hepatitis B infection in member states.

The number of cases of acute hepatitis B reported to the WHO European office by European Union member states in 1994, the latest for year for which most complete data are available, are given in the table. The incidence of acute hepatitis B per 100,000 for EU member states who have provided data to WHO has been calculated using population figures as at 1 January 1994 taken from EUROSTAT (Demographic Statistics).

Country	*Number of cases of acute hepatitis B*	*Population in millions*	*Incidence per 100,000*
Austria	241	8.0	3.0
Belgium	51	10.1	0.5
Denmark	127	5.2	2.4
France	—	57.8	—
Finland	192	5.1	3.8
Germany	5,166	81.3	6.4
Greece	222	10.4	2.1
Ireland	—	3.6	—
Italy	2,733	57.1	4.8
Luxembourg	72	0.4	18.0
Netherlands	213	15.3	1.4
Portugal	1,114	9.9	11.3
Spain	—	39.1	—
Sweden	264	8.7	3.0
United Kingdom	[1]535	[58.3]	[1]—

[1] This figure includes only cases from England. Using a 1994 population for England of 48.7 millions the rate of acute cases of hepatitis B in England for that year was 1.1 per 100,000.

Seroprevalence rates for chronic hepatitis B infection in other countries are not held centrally.

We understand that in Europe, Italy and France have implemented national policies to immunise infants and adolescents, Spain and Portugal have implemented policies for adolescents; and Belgium has recently begun to introduce a policy for infant and adolescent immunisation.

For the three non-European members of the Group of Seven, we understand that the United States has introduced a universal infant programme, Canada has mainly a universal adolescent policy but with some provinces favouring infant immunisation and Japan has not implemented a universal programme having a selective immunisation policy with particular focus on prevention of perinatal transmission through screening in pregnancy.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the extent to which Government policy has reduced the incidence of hepatitis B; and what new measures he plans to reduce such incidence. [38470]

Mr. Horam: Reports of acute hepatitis B to the public health laboratory service have fallen from a peak of just under 2,000 reports in England in 1984 to 612 reports in 1995—provisional figure. This decrease occurred in most groups at increased risk of infection.

This may be linked to the modification of risk behaviours in response to Government initiatives to promote safer sexual practices and recognised techniques for reducing the risks associated with injecting drug misuse, such as needle and syringe exchange schemes, in the light of HIV-AIDS, as well as our immunisation policy targeted at those at increased risk of infection.

These initiatives will continue and hepatitis B immunisation policy will be kept under review.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the hepatitis B vaccination coverage rate for *(a)* GPs, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* police, *(d)* homosexual males, *(e)* drug abusers and *(f)* babies born to carrier mothers. [38461]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Barron : To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of hepatitis B cases in each of the last three years fell within the definition of at risk categories in each *(a)* health authority and *(b)* region. [38485]

Mr. Horam: Confirmed cases of acute hepatitis B infection are reported by laboratories to the public health laboratory service under a voluntary and confidential surveillance system. The information requested, which is available only by regional health authority, is given in the table.

Regional Health Authority	*Total reports of acute hepatitis B infection*	*Number of reports with information about the patient*	*Number of cases identified from information given as falling with defined risk groups*	*Percentage of reports with information about the patient which fall within defined risk groups*
1993				
Northern	15	10	10	100
Yorkshire	49	29	29	100
Trent	25	18	17	94
East Anglia	19	14	12	86
North-west Thames	64	46	45	98
North-east Thames	74	48	45	94
South-east Thames	67	49	44	90
South-west Thames	29	19	18	95
Wessex	23	19	18	95
Oxford	25	21	20	95
South Western	47	45	44	98
West Midlands	47	27	26	96
Mersey	56	53	42	79
North Western	68	50	45	90
Total	607	448	415	94

Regional Health Authority	Total reports of acute hepatitis B infection	Number of reports with information about the patient	Number of cases identified from information given as falling with defined risk groups	Percentage of reports with information about the patient which fall within defined risk groups
1994				
Northern	17	12	12	100
Yorkshire	66	55	55	100
Trent	49	31	28	90
East Anglia	19	14	12	86
North-west Thames	35	24	23	96
North-east Thames	41	27	26	96
South-east Thames	71	60	56	93
South-west Thames	29	20	19	95
Wessex	28	20	18	90
Oxford	24	19	15	79
South Western	50	46	45	98
West Midlands	45	8	7	88
Mersey	59	47	40	85
North Western	69	44	41	93
Total	601	427	397	92
1995				
Northern	21	9	9	100
Yorkshire	102	67	67	100
Trent	49	38	38	100
East Anglia	23	9	8	89
North-west Thames	26	11	11	100
North-east Thames	27	15	13	87
South-east Thames	62	40	37	93
South-west Thames	32	20	20	100
Wessex	21	19	16	84
Oxford	35	23	21	91
South Western	21	18	14	78
West Midlands	40	18	15	83
Mersey	80	65	60	92
North Western	45	21	20	95
Total	584	373	349	92

1. The public health laboratory service reporting system records reports under the following risk groups: injecting drug users; sex between men; sex between men and women; sexual contact unspecified; children of hepatitis B carrier mothers; family/household contacts; medical treatments; occupational exposure; and institutional exposure.

2. Approximately two thirds of reports received by PHLS provide information relating to risk groups.

District Health Authority Finance

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each district health authority for each of the financial years 1996–97 and 1997–98 and subsequent years for which figures can be given or estimated *(a)* the recurrent deficit, *(b)* the non-recurrent surplus deficit, *(c)* movements in balances, *(d)* the cash deficit and *(e)* those deficits expressed as a percentage of revenue or expenditure. [38788]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is based on estimates subject to revision. It is not suitable for publication.

Blood Products

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what informed consent is sought from, and what information is given to, blood donors concerning circumstances in which their donation may be sold *(a)* outside the NHS, *(b)* into the private sector and *(c)* outside the United Kingdom; [38469]

(2) if he will make a statement about the circumstances in which the NHS patients charter commitment that blood donations will not be sold *(a)* applies fully, *(b)* applies with qualifications and *(c)* does not apply. [38472]

Mr. Horam: The consent of donors is not required for the national blood service to make supplies of donated blood available outside the national health service. Blood itself is never sold, although a handling charge is made to cover the costs of collecting, testing, processing and delivering blood. The commitment given in the blood donors charter therefore applies fully. However, as is also stated in the charter, surplus blood products derived from donations of whole blood may be sold to any other country after NHS demand has been satisfied. This avoids waste of a valuable resource and keeps down costs to the NHS. Details of what happens to donations is made available to donors through leaflets produced by the NBS and through the charter.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many units of each type of blood product were *(a)* supplied to private hospitals and *(b)* used by private patients within NHS units for each of the last three years; for which figures are available; [38516]

(2) what is the order of priority for the supply of blood products for supply to *(a)* the NHS, *(b)* the private sector and *(c)* overseas users in times of acute United Kingdom or regional shortage; [38467]

(3) what is the method of invoicing and payment for blood products supplied for private sector use; [38468]

(4) what charges are levied on *(a)* private hospitals and *(b)* private medical practitioners for the supply of blood products for use outside the NHS. [38515]

Mr. Horam: Information about the amount of blood products supplied to private hospitals and to private patients within national health service units is not collected centrally. Blood products manufactured from plasma derived from freely donated blood in the United Kingdom may be exported only if they are surplus to NHS requirements.

Methods of invoicing and payment and fees charged are a matter for suppliers.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken to comply with the commitments given in the NHS patients charter in respect of blood donors; and if he will make a statement. [38466]

Mr. Horam: As part of the national health service patient's charter programme, an interim blood donor's charter was published last November. The National Blood Authority is working towards the implementation of the targets for improved services to blood donors set out in that charter and will publish performance results each year. The charter will be reviewed after a year, taking account of the comments being invited from doctors.

Growth Hormone

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy with regard to the financial compensation of those treated with contaminated pituitary-derived human growth hormone and gonadotrophin. [38616]

Mr. Horam: We will study last Friday's judgment in detail and consider what response is appropriate. We remain committed to providing, through the national health service, suitable support and counselling to all patients treated with human growth hormone, or gonadotrophin, and their families.

Regional Health Authority Functions

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the functions previously carried out by regional health authorities which have been *(a)* transferred to the NHS executive, *(b)* transferred to district health authorities, *(c)* contracted out and *(d)* abandoned. [38870]

Mr. Horam: The functions of the national health service executive and new health authorities are set out in the statement of responsibilities and accountabilities published on 24 May 1995, copies of which are available in the Library. Regional health authorities were abolished on 31 March 1996, and on 1 April 1996 district health authorities and family health services authorities merged to form new health authorities. Prior to the abolition of the RHAs, the NHS executive issued guidance to the NHS, health service guidance (94)22 and (94)53, on the disposition of RHA functions.

Nurses' Pay

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts *(a)* are already paying nurses a locally negotiated pay award, *(b)* are negotiating with nurses over a local pay award, *(c)* have made an offer on which negotiation has yet to begin and *(d)* have not yet made an offer on which to negotiate locally. [38886]

Mr. Malone: The timing and structure of local pay offers is a matter for national health service management. It is for each trust to decide whether to make public the position it has reached.

Health Care (Students)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State Health (1) how many staff are employed to assess eligibility for free prescriptions, dental work, eye tests and spectacle vouchers for students; and at what annual cost; [38405]

(2) what is the estimated cost of extending free prescriptions, dental work, eye tests and spectacle vouchers to *(a)* all students within higher education and *(b)* all students entitled to a full student grant. [38406]

Mr. Malone: Claims for entitlement to spectacle vouchers, free national health service prescriptions, dental treatment and sight tests under the NHS low-income scheme are assessed by the health benefits division of the Prescription Pricing Authority. Costs and staffing figures in respect of claims by students are not separately identified.

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish a breakdown of members of ethnic minorities employed in the NHS as *(a)* ancillaries, *(b)* nurses and *(c)* doctors for each of the past five years and the grades held by these staff; [37034]

(2) if he will publish a breakdown of members of ethnic minorities employed in health authorities as *(a)* executive members, *(b)* non-executive members, *(c)* senior officers, *(d)* managerial staff and *(e)* clerical/administrative staff; [37026]

(3) if he will publish a breakdown of members of ethnic minorities employed in NHS trusts as *(a)* executive members, *(b)* non-executive members, *(c)* senior officers, *(d)* managerial staff and *(e)* clerical/administrative staff. [37027]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* Information about nursing and midwifery staff by grade at September 1993 was published in the Department of Health statistical bulletin "NHS Hospital and Community Health Services Non-Medical Staff in England" in November 1994, copies of which are available in the Library. Information about the ethnic origin of all non-medical staff as at September 1994 will be published shortly and placed in the Library.

Information about medical staff for 1992/3/4 is published in the Department of Health statistical bulletins "Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Service Medical and Dental Staff in England" and is held in the Library. Data for 1995 will be placed in the Library shortly.

These are the latest figures available; figures for earlier years are not available.

Information about executive members and senior officers is not available centrally.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 12 July, *Official Report*, column *334*, for information about non-executive members.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* ethnic minority and *(b)* white nurses there were in the NHS in each of the last five years (i) by grade, (ii) by region and (iii) nationally; [37142]

(2) how many *(a)* ethnic minority and *(b)* white nurses there were at grade G in each of the last five years. [37141]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* Information relating to the ethnicity of national health service nursing and midwifery staff in England in 1993 by grade was published in the Department of Health statistical bulletin 1994/11, copies of which are available

in the Library. This is the latest information available. Information relating to earlier years is not available centrally.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to ensure equal access to the delivery of services within the NHS for ethnic minority groups. [37033]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* a number of measures are in place to ensure equal access to those from the ethnic minority communities: i) the patients charter, which aims to provide better information and health services to everyone (including ethnic minority groups) by meeting their religious and cultural needs. The patients charter has been produced in several ethnic languages; ii) in the last five years, the Department has made around £6.5 million available in direct grants to demonstration projects and ethnic minority voluntary groups to improve ethnic health—for example, it has funded a number of linkworker and advocacy schemes which improve access to services to ethnic minority groups. Copies of relevant reports published recently—"Consumer Empowerment" and "A Case For the Provision Of Bilingual Services Within The NHS"—have been placed in the Library; iii) the NHS ethnic health unit has been established to work with health authorities, national health service trusts and general practitioners to experiment with new ways of improving services in partnership with local ethnic minority people.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current percentage of *(a)* midwives and *(b)* health visitors who are from ethnic minorities. [37100]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* Information relating to the ethnic origin of midwives and health visitors is not available centrally.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the expenditure on the ethnic minority health unit in his Department in each of the last five years; and what is the budget for the next three years. [37094]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* The national health service ethnic health unit was established for three years by Ministers in 1993, to work with NHS organisations to improve services for black and minority ethnic people by harnessing current Government health policies. This followed the report of a task force on how good practice might be spread throughout the NHS. The unit began a focused programme of work in March 1994 which is due to conclude, as intended, in March 1997. The unit's annual budget is of the order of £1.3 million.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 23 July 1996

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Youth Courts

Mr. Michael: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the average time an indictable offence took *(a)* from offence to charge or summons, *(b)* from charge or summons to first listing, *(c)* from first listing to completion and *(d)* from offence to completion for cases proceeding through youth courts for (i) England and Wales and (ii) each region in England and Wales in 1984 and 1994. [38798]

Mr. Streeter: The information requested for 1994 is contained in the accompanying table; however, similar data were not collected in 1984. The table includes information on all indictable offences—both indictable only and triable either way. The source of the figures is the magistrates courts time intervals survey. This survey collects information on all defendants in indictable cases in one sample week of February, June and October each year.

Caution needs to be exercised when comparing figures from different areas because sampling error in the figures could make any conclusions invalid. This is especially true for areas where the sample size was less than 100.

Average time taken for indictable offences heard in the youth court by stage of proceedings and by standard region, 1994, England and Wales

Average number of days	*Offence to charge or summons*	*Charge or summons to first listing*	*First listing to completion*	*Offence to completion*	
England and Wales	39	26	67	132	
English regions and Wales					
North England	35	24	67	125	
North West England	34	23	58	115	
Yorkshire and Humberside	32	23	73	128	
East Midlands	38	25	81	144	
West Midlands	35	25	71	131	
East Anglia	42	26	57	125	Sample size less than 100
Greater London	38	30	76	144	
South East (except London)	63	28	57	148	
South West	35	26	64	125	
Wales	41	26	59	127	

Figures for the constituent intervals may not sum exactly to average offence to completion time due to rounding.

Public Record Office

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what conclusions were drawn in the evaluation of performance carried out for the Public Record Office following its establishment as a next steps executive agency. [39678]

Mr. Streeter: An evaluation of the performance of the Public Record Office during its first three years as an executive agency was carried out by the Public Record Office in conjunction with the Lord Chancellor's Department and a report was completed in June 1996.

The report concluded that the office had benefited considerably from its move to agency status which had led it to re-evaluate and to clarify its aims and objectives within its statutory role, and to focus on improving its performance and on meeting the needs of its users. The office has made notable advances in planning and managing its work and resources and has achieved efficiency gains and service improvements in a period in which its work load was increasing and in which it also successfully undertook a major building programme at its Kew site.

Copies of the evaluation report will be laid in the Libraries of both Houses.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the total income received from lottery ticket sales in Cheshire since the start of the national lottery. [36383]

Mr. Sproat: This is a matter for the Director General of the National Lottery. I have therefore asked the director general to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his letter in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list by county the percentage of lottery tickets purchased in each and the percentage of lottery awards funding received by each since the creation of the national lottery. [37696]

Mr. Sproat: Sales figure are an operational matter for the Director General of the National Lottery who is responsible for regulating the operation of the lottery and I have therefore asked him to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his letter in the Library of the House. The new awards database currently being tested by my Department will soon be able to show the percentage of lottery awards received by each county and I will write to the hon. Member with this information when it is available.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking to co-ordinate with other authorities measures to prevent the illegal purchase of national lottery tickets by minors. [38953]

Mr. Sproat: The Secretary of State has directed the director general not to licence games, which, in his opinion, do not have sufficient controls to prevent the participation of young people under the age of 16. In the director general's annual report, laid before the House on 17 July, he details measures he has taken to deal with this issue.

The sale of lottery tickets to minors is illegal. Camelot, as promoter of all lotteries forming part of the national lottery, is responsible for ensuring compliance with the law. My Department has taken part in co-ordination meetings with the other relevant authorities—the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Crown Prosecution Service and trading standards organisations—with an enforcement interest in this matter.

Tourist Information Centres

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the present total number of tourist information centres in the United Kingdom; and what arrangements are planned to centralise information. [38423]

Mr. Sproat: There are 831 tourist information centres in the UK. This includes 562 in England, 160 in Scotland, 84 in Wales and 25 in Northern Ireland. In England, these are largely operated by local authorities with the English tourist board supporting common standards, staff training and national branding. Network TICs have to be prepared to offer information on destinations other than those in their local areas.

The ETB has a number of initiatives under way to improve the collection and provision of information. It co-ordinates the collection of data on attractions, events and accommodation into its tourism resource information processing systems—TRIPS—database. ETB has launched a Network 2000 project to determine how services might be enhanced by greater use of information technology and the internet. This includes a pilot project to make the TRIPS information available on-line to TICs.

British Academy of Sport

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the specific roles for *(a)* the United Kingdom Sports Council, *(b)* the British Olympic Association and *(c)* the private sector has in the proposed British academy of sport. [39104]

Mr. Sproat: Details of the Government's proposals for the British academy of sport, including the roles of the United Kingdom Sports Council, the home country sports councils and other sporting organisations, will be set out in the prospectus which will be published shortly.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what targets she has set for the executive agencies in her Department. [39637]

Mr. Sproat: The following targets have been set for 1996–97:

The Historic Royal Palaces Agency

Financial targets

Commercial surplus: £8 million

Call on the taxpayer: £6.7 million

Visitor satisfaction measures[1]

Visitors' average ratings of:

Value for money: 0.7 to 1.0

Enjoyment: above 1.4

Helpful and friendly staff: above 1.45

Efficiency target

Savings on running costs: 2 per cent.

Conservation target

To complete both the fire protection works planned for 1996–97, and the programme of works identified by the buildings condition surveys as needed in 1996–97. To undertake further detailed inspection of the specific areas identified by the surveys as possibly needing work in 1997–98.

[1] Visitor ratings are assessed from interviews with about 600 visitors each year, conducted by independent market research consultants. Ratings: 2.0 is extremely good, 1.5 is very good, 1.0 is quite good, 0 is OK, –1.0 is quite poor, and –2.0 is very poor.

The Royal Parks Agency

Financial

(i) Increase income from £2.48 million to £2.7 million from permits, fees, licenses, events, concessions and car parking.

(ii) Achieve a 6 per cent. improvement in running costs efficiency.

(iii) Invite tenders for a private finance initiative scheme for Pembroke lodge in Richmond park.

(iv) Establish a target by October 1996 for Royal Parks constabulary unit costs based on a reduction of the 1995–96 costs.

Fabric

(i) Prepare proposals for works to remove the White lodge in Bushy park from the "at risk" register.

(ii) Investigate opportunities for marketing columbarium spaces to fund further restoration works in Brompton cemetery catacombs, with a view to removing them from the "at risk" register.

(iii) Evaluate competitive tenders for works maintenance services and award new contracts by the end of 1996.

(iv) Achieve average visitor rating of 80 per cent. on cleanliness of the royal parks.

Visitor survey

Achieve an overall score of 8.3 out of 10 visitor satisfaction rating for the royal parks.

Assessment of soft landscaping quality

Achieve an overall score of 8 out of 10 for the soft landscaping presentation in the royal parks.

Statistical Forms

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the statistical forms issued to businesses by her Department, indicating the number of each sent out. [38674]

Mr. Sproat: My Department issues no statistical forms to business.

Works of Art

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 11 July, *Official Report*, columns *251-52*, if she will take steps to promote the expediting of the allocations of works of art and museum objects which have already been accepted in satisfaction of inheritance tax during the years 1992 to 1994; and if she will make a statement giving reasons for the delay which has taken place in the four instances concerned. [38697]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The list supplied in my answer of 11 July was a comprehensive one covering all items which I have agreed may be accepted in lieu of tax and which are still active, and the date of that agreement. The list was not therefore confined solely to items which have been finally accepted in lieu of tax—for which memoranda have been exchanged between the Inland Revenue and the relevant estate and for which the Revenue has been compensated by my Department for the tax forgone. Once I have agreed acceptance, it may, in some cases, take time for acceptance or allocation to follow. This may be for legal, taxation and other such technical reasons. I cannot comment on individual cases because of the law relating to the confidentiality of taxpayers' affairs—section 182 of the Finance Act 1989. It is the Museums and Galleries Commission which advises me both on whether to agree the acceptance of AIL offers and on their allocation. My Department, the MGC, and all other parties involved in administering and negotiating the allocation of accepted items will continue to do so as speedily as the technical complexities allow.

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make it her policy to favour a more flexible interpretation of what may constitute significant partnership funding required in order to make available lottery funding for the acquisition by public institutions of exceptional works of art; and if she will make a statement. [38666]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* My policy is that partnership funding should be required. I have encouraged the lottery distributors to be flexible in their interpretations of this requirement reflecting the circumstances in which they operate.

Bay Radio Ltd.

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what action has been taken by the Radio Authority under section 86 of the Broadcasting Act 1990 to review the suitability of Bay Radio Ltd. to hold a licence to operate a radio station; and if she will make a statement. [38261]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The licensing of independent radio stations is for the Radio Authority. I understand that it has not at this stage undertaken a review of the suitability of Bay Radio Ltd. under section 86 of the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Government Art Collection

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what arrangements exist and what proposals he has to encourage contemporary artists through displays of paintings and sculpture in Government-owned buildings. [38424]

Mr. Sproat: The Government art collection, with guidance from its advisory committee, buys and commissions paintings and sculpture by contemporary British artists for display in Government buildings at home and abroad. The GAC occasionally supplements its own holdings by borrowing contemporary works from other collections for display in particular locations.

TRANSPORT

Railways (Complaints)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many complaints he has received regarding the newly privatised parts of the rail network; and how many about those services provided by British Rail in the same period. [33179]

Mr. Watts: Since the commencement of the first franchised services on 4 February 1996, I have received 29 complaints about railway passenger services operated by franchise operators, and 219 about those operated by British Rail.

Rail Near Miss Registration

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will put in place a system of near miss registration, anonymous if necessary, to register situations concerning workers on the track similar to that applying in the aviation industry. [38538]

Mr. Watts: I have no current plans to do so. It is the responsibility of the railway industry itself to manage its affairs properly to control risks to staff. For some time now, details of near misses involving track workers have been recorded by the industry in support of the drive to reduce track casualties.

Rail (Investment Projects)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many major projects in British Rail's 1991 "Future Rail—The Next Decade" investment prospectus are under construction. [38536]

Mr. Watts: British Rail's document "Future Rail—The Next Decade", published in July 1991, mentioned seven projects involving the construction of new railway lines and the upgrading of existing lines. Of those seven projects, three are completed—the Birmingham cross-city electricification scheme, the Manchester metrolink light rail scheme and the Manchester airport rail link. One—Heathrow express—is under construction. The remaining three—the channel tunnel rail link, Thameslink 2000 and crossrail—are at various stages of development.

Salaries

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is for each agency within his Department and the Central Transport Group the median basic salary, excluding all allowances except local pay allowances for each grade from AA to SEO employed in London. [38603]

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows:

	CTG	DSA	DVLA	HA	MSA	TCA	VI
AA	10,497	9,523	9,248	10,227	—	—	10,663
AO	12,036	11,613	11,329	10,655	—	—	13,179
Typist	10,879	9,924	9,144	11,123	10,164	—	11,447
Per Sec	13,560	12,214	11,076	13,672	—	—	—
Sen Per Sec	17,104	15,739	14,355	16,043	—	—	—
SGB 2	—	9,602	—	—	—	—	—
SGB 1	10,651	10,695	10,534	9,920	—	—	—
EO	16,164	14,814	14,587	16,000	—	—	—
PTO	15,849	—	16,653	18,750	—	—	18,727
HEO	20,426	19,187	19,198	20,218	16,665	—	—
HPTO	21,067	—	19,289	24,406	—	—	21,696
SEO	24,530	23,669	23,769	24,408	—	—	—
SPTO	27,186	—	24,650	31,185	—	—	28,552
AT/HEOD	19,963	—	—	—	—	—	—
DX	—	14,962	—	—	—	—	—
SDX(T)	—	17,194	—	—	—	—	—
SDX(M)	—	17,716	—	—	—	—	—
SUDX	—	19,573	—	—	—	—	—
ACDX	—	21,415	—	—	—	—	—
H/P	—	—	—	—	—	—	9,115
TEST	—	—	—	—	—	—	13,179
AVE	—	—	—	—	—	—	15,849
TE	—	—	—	—	—	—	15,693
STE	—	—	—	—	—	—	19,477

The figures provided in this answer are, in all cases, prior to the implementation of 1996 pay settlements.

Key to Agencies:

DSA Driving Standard Agency
DVLA Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency
HA Highways Agency
MSA Marine Safety Agency
TCA Coastguards Agency
VI Vehicle Inspectorate*Key to Grades:*
Per Sec Personal Secretary
Sen Per Sec Senior Personal Secretary
SGB Support Grade Band
AT/HEOD Administrative Trainee/Higher Executive Officer (Development)
PTO Professional and Technological Officer (including equivalents)
DX Driving Examiner
SDX Senior Driving Examiner
SUDX Superintending Driving Examiner
ACDX Assistant Chief Driving Examiner
H/P Handyperson
TEST Tester
AVE Assistant Vehicle Examiner
TE Traffic Examiner
STE Senior Traffic Examiner

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is for each agency within his Department and the Central Transport Group the median basic salary, excluding all allowances except local pay allowances for each grade from AA to SEO employed outside London. [38602]

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows:

	CTG	DSA	DVLA	HA	MSA	TCA	VI
AA	8,530	8,643	8,546	6,928	8,979	7,496	9,115
AO	11,581	10,504	10,587	10,537	10,876	11,377	11,292
Typist	9,903	8,831	8,741	10,482	9,716	10,164	10,348
Per Sec	12,246	10,972	11,076	12,311	12,174	11,636	13,179
Sen PS	—	14,267	14,355	15,512	—	—	15,538
SGB 2	—	9,602	10,012	9,920	10,124	—	9,415
SGB 1	—	10,695	—	—	—	8,602	11,843
EO	15,520	14,238	14,006	14,901	15,208	15,520	15,849
PTO	13,651	—	16,653	17,658	—	13,962	17,658
HEO	19,812	18,437	18,432	18,828	19,215	19,611	18,911
HPTO	20,861	—	19,289	21,275	—	18,911	20,454
SEO	24,780	22,371	22,822	23,077	—	24,035	23,932
SPTO	28,833	—	24,650	27,998	26,920	22,562	25,633
CGO	—	—	—	—	—	13,598	—
Stat Off	—	—	—	—	—	17,182	—
Dist Off	—	—	—	—	—	19,611	—
M Surv 2	—	—	—	—	18,007	—	—
M Surv 1	—	—	—	—	27,998	—	—
DX	—	14,238	—	—	—	—	—
SDX(T)	—	16,524	—	—	—	—	—
SDX(M)	—	17,025	—	—	—	—	—
SUDX	—	18,808	—	—	—	—	—
ACDX	—	20,507	—	—	—	—	—
H/P	—	—	—	—	—	—	8,679
TEST	—	—	—	—	—	—	13,179
AVE	—	—	—	—	—	—	15,220
TE	—	—	—	—	—	—	15,378
STE	—	—	—	—	—	—	18,727
EM	—	—	—	—	—	—	21,485

The figures provided in this answer are, in all cases, prior to the implementation of the 1996 pay settlements.

Key to grades

Persec: Personal Secretary

Sen PS: Senior Personal Secretary

SGB: Support Grade Band

AT/HEOD: Administrative Trainee/Higher Executive Officer (Development)

PTO: Professional and Technological Officer (including equivalents)

DX: Driving Examiner

SDX: Senior Driving Examiner

SUDX: Superintending Driving Examiner

ACDX: Assistant Chief Driving Examiner

H/P: Handyperson

TEST: Tester

AVE: Assistant Vehicle Examiner

TE: Traffic Examiner

STE: Senior Traffic Examiner

MSURV2: Marine Surveyor Grade 2

CGO: Coastguard Officer

Stat Off: Station Officer

Dist Off: District Officer

Key to agencies:

DSA: Driving Standards Agency

DVLA: Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

HA: Highways Agency

MSA: Marine Safety Agency

TCA: Coastguards Agency

VI: Vehicle Inspectorate

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each agency within his Department and the Central Transport Group the number by grade of staff earning less than £8,847.86 per annum. [38599]

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows:

	AA	AO	Typist	SGB 1 and 2
CTG	66	3	0	2
DSA	235	0	0	0
DVLA	67	0	6	0
HA	26	126	0	15
MSA	27	9	4	0
TCA	9	2	0	1
VI	106	0	3	2

VI also have 27 Handypersons earning less than £8,847.86 per annum.

The figures provided in this answer are prior to the implementation of the 1996 pay settlements and, for part-time staff, are based on full-time equivalent salaries.

Key to grades:

AA: Administrative Assistant

AO: Administrative Officer

SGB1 and 2: Support Grade Bands 1 and 2

Key to agencies:

DSA: Driving Standards Agency

DVLA: Drive and Vehicle Licensing Agency

HA: Highways Agency

MSA: Marine Safety Agency

TCA: Coastguards Agency

VI: Vehicle Inspectorate

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each agency within his Department and the Central Transport Group for the administrative assistant and administrative officer grade the median basic salary excluding all allowances other than local pay additions for women employed *(a)* on a part-time basis and *(b)* a full-time basis. [38596]

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows:

£

	AA		AO	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Central Transport Group	10,116	10,007	12,036	11,906
Driving Standards Agency	8,643	5,351	10,504	6,503
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	8,546	n/a	10,587	n/a
Highways Agency	10,262	[1]5,646	12,106	[1]6,697
Marine Safety Agency	8,979	[1]4,424	10,876	[1]5,438
Coastguards Agency	7,412	7,755	11,636	10,753
Vehicle Inspectorate	9,265	9,415	11,292	11,920

Part-time salaries are given on a full-time equivalent basis other than where marked with [1]. The figures for part-time staff in DVLA are not currently available. They will be provided later.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for the Central Transport Group the median and mean salary levels for each grade employed and for staff employed *(a)* in London and *(b)* outside London. [38604]

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows:

	Mean salary	Median salary
SCS		
London	56,395	53,088
National	52,531	51,112
Grade 6		
London	43,240	43,632
National	41,720	41,047
Grade 7		
London	34,818	35,649
National	33,963	33,211
SEO		
London	26,464	26,688
National	24,838	25,554
SPTO		
London	28,236	28,962
National	28,429	28,552
HEO		
London	21,877	22,267
National	19,765	20,047
HPTO		
London	22,759	24,338
National	20,614	20,454
EO		
London	17,732	18,051
National	15,215	15,642
PTO		
London	17,010	17,314
National	13,651	13,651
SEN PS		
London	19,992	20,057
National	—	—
PER SEC		
London	17,409	17,612
National	14,588	14,673
Typist		
London	15,205	15,168
National	11,564	11,726
AO		
London	14,413	14,626
National	11,311	11,581
AA		
London	11,925	12,273
National	8,455	8,530
AT/HEOD	20,177	21,739
SGB 1 and 2	11,908	12,145

The figures provided in this answer are prior to the implementation of the 1996 pay settlement, other than for the Senior Civil Service.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each agency within his Department and the Central Transport Group the mean basic salary for women employed on *(a)* a part-time basis and *(b)* a full-time basis. [38598]

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows:

	Full-time £	Part-time £
Central Transport Group	14,841	16,238
Driving Standards Agency	12,028	[1]4,865
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	12,259	n/a

	Full-time £	*Part-time* £
Highways Agency	13,688	[1]8,504
Marine Safety Agency	11,750	5,875
Coastguards Agency	13,442	10,022
Vehicle Inspectorate	11,966	9,895

For those in grades below the senior civil service, the figures provided in this answer are prior to the implementation of the 1996 pay settlements. Part-time salaries are given on a full-time equivalent basis except where marked[1]. The figures for part-time staff in DLVA are not available. They will be provided later.

Rail Public Service Obligation Grant

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the public service obligation grant made to the railways for each year since 1992. [38585]

Mr. Watts: The information requested, for the three years 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94, is as follows:

Year	*Public Service obligation grant payments (£ million cash)*
1991–92	892
1992–93	1,155
1993–94	930

1993–94 is the last year in which public service obligation grant was paid.

Automatic Train Protection

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of automatic train protection trials that are in operation, on what lines they are operating, the number of trains on which automatic protection is fitted, the number of trains on which automatic trainprotection is operating and the number of drivers trained in the use of automatic train protection. [38522]

Mr. Watts: Two automatic train protection equipment trials have been undertaken, one on the Chiltern line and the other on the Great Western main line. The trials were designed to allow technical evaluation of different equipment. The numbers of trains fitted and crews trained for the purposes of the trials are not available.

The trials have now been completed and it is intended that the schemes will be brought into full normal operation by October 1996.

London Underground operates a "train stop" type automatic train protection system throughout its network.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress his Department has made regarding the introduction of automated train protection. [38521]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack's train protection strategy is a major programme incorporating several initiatives which will further reduce the number of signals passed at danger. These initiatives include:

(i) the bringing into full service operation of the pilot ATP schemes on the Chiltern and Great Western routes, planned for October 1996.

(ii) the development of a train protection warning system to replace the existing automatic warning system at selected locations. This will provide train stop and red signal speed trap facilities. The development contract was let by Railtrack earlier this year and equipment has been installed which will allow trials to take place.

(iii) the development of radio-based cab signalling, initially as part of the modernisation of the West Coast main line. Two development contracts have been let and work is proceeding.

In addition, other initiatives to prevent SPADS, including a driver reminder appliance, have been the subject of successful trials and wider application is planned to follow.

Although it is not reasonably practicable to fit on a network wide basis the system of ATP which have piloted, the Health and Safety Executive would expect to see a form of ATP, or an equivalent protection system, incorporated on any new high speed line such as the channel tunnel rail link and fully considered in any new major resignalling scheme.

The HSE's HM railway inspectorate will be closely monitoring progress towards delivery of Railtrack's train protection strategy.

Rolling Stock Companies (Train Recorders)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations his Department has made to the ROSCOs in relation to the introduction of black box recorders in trains. [38525]

Mr. Watts: None. The Health and Safety Executive's guidance calls for the provision of black box recorders and most new passenger rolling stock is equipped with diagnostic and data recording equipment.

Rail Accident Investigation Reports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will include in section 14 of the Health and Safety at work, etc. Act 1974 a regulation to ensure that accident investigation reports are published and disseminated throughout the railway industry. [38545]

Mr. Watts: Section 14 already provides that the Health and Safety Commission may direct an investigation into an accident and publish a report. The commission's stated policy is to publish reports of serious accidents investigations carried out under the 1974 Act. In addition, the commission's railway industry advisory committee is examining existing arrangements for disseminating information gained from accident investigations.

Capital Settlements

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the average English local authority transport capital settlement, including grant and credit approval, as a percentage of the amount bid for; and what were the corresponding average percentages for *(a)* Labour-controlled councils and *(b)* all Conservative-controlled councils. [39054]

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 8 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *73*. Figures are not kept according to the political control of the council.

Rail Users Consultative Committees

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the chairmen of rail users consultative committees both central and regional are or have been active in the Conservative party. [39133]

Mr. Watts: The information is not available. Current chairmen of the rail users consultative committees were never required to provide information concerning their political activities, although applicants responding to notices about membership are now requested to supply such details. The conditions of chairmen's appointments contain guidance concerning political activity designed to ensure any such interests do not prejudice the committees' work.

Seat Belts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what surveys he has done to ascertain the percentage of children wearing seat belts in cars; and if he will make a statement on the findings. [39250]

Mr. Norris: Surveys of car occupant restraint use are conducted every six months. The latest survey, in April, showed that 95 per cent. of children under the age of 14 were found to be wearing restraints in the front passenger seat of cars but only 79 per cent. were found to be wearing restraints in the rear seats of cars. We regularly run publicity campaigns on the importance of wearing belts and our recent campaign was aimed specifically at encouraging children to wear restraints in the rear seats of cars.

Child Pedestrians

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance he has issued in respect of the age at which children no longer require supervision as pedestrians. [39275]

Mr. Norris: The Department has issued joint guidance, with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and other road safety bodies, on the topic "Teaching Children To Be Safer Pedestrians". This advises that children up to the age of seven should always be supervised. Above this age, parents and carers need to judge what level of supervision is required depending on local traffic conditions and the experience and responsibility of the child.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (i) what proposals he has and (ii) targets he has set for reducing death and injury to children on the road; [39276]

(2) what plans he has for educational initiatives to reduce death and injury to children on the road. [39277]

Mr. Norris: My Department has today announced a strategy to reduce child pedestrian fatalities by a quarter by the end of the century. This would save the lives of at least 30 children a year and reduce serious injuries by some 1,000 a year.

Under the strategy, the Department will continue to promote educational initiatives to reduce deaths and injuries to children on the roads.

Bus and Coach Directive

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what working papers have been circulated to his Department by the European Commission in the course of its preparations for the EC bus and coach directive. [39157]

Mr. Norris: Numerous working group documents, including those from other member states, as well as an early version of Commission proposals have been circulated.

A66

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will ensure that any connection road built between Elton and Longnewton ancillary to the proposed A66 grade separated junction is reserved for the use of buses only; [38924]

(2) if he will make a statement on the timing of the compulsory purchase orders for the construction of the A66 grade separated junction at Longnewton; [38923]

(3) when he expects construction work to commence on the A66 grade separated junction at Longnewton. [38922]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Tim Devlin, dated 23 July 1996:

As you know, the Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the A66 Long Newton Grade Separated Junction.

Restricting the use of the link road between Elton and Long Newton to buses only was debated at length at the Public Inquiry in September 1995. The Independent Inspector concluded that the link road should be available to all traffic, including pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians. He did not accept that the predicted traffic flows through Elton, as a result of providing the link road, would be untoward. The Secretaries of State for the Environment and Transport fully accepted the Inspector's conclusions and recommendations in their decision letter of 1 July.

The detailed design of the scheme and the making of the compulsory Purchase Order will be commenced in the near future to allow works to start as soon as financial resources become available.

Noise Barriers

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times in each of the last 10 years noise mitigation barriers have been *(a)* replaced, *(b)* repaired and *(c)* upgraded; and what has been the cost to his Department. [38303]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking how many times in each of the last 10 years noise mitigation barriers have been (a) replaced, (b) repaired and (c) upgraded; and what has been the cost to his Department.

The information is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money his Department has spent on noise mitigation barriers adjacent to motorways in each of the last 10 years. [38304]

Mr. Watts: The following amounts have been spent in the past two financial years.

1994–95: £437,000

1995–96: £6,116,000

Data for this previous eight years are not available without incurring a disproportionate cost to the Department.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what design standards currently exist for noise mitigation barriers adjacent to *(a)* motorways and *(b)* railway lines; [38299]

(2) what procedures currently exist for *(a)* checking whether noise mitigation barriers adjacent to (i) motorways and (ii) railway lines meet the required design standards and *(b)* ensuring that those barriers which are found not to meet the required design standards are improved to meet them; [38300]

(3) what assessment he has made of the site supervision and checking of structural calculations for noise mitigation barriers adjacent to *(a)* motorways and *(b)* railway lines. [38301]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member. Noise mitigation barriers adjacent to railway lines are a matter for Railtrack.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about noise mitigation barriers.

Guidance on the design of environmental barriers which include noise mitigation barriers is provided in the HMSO publication Design of Roads and Bridges: Volume 10 Environmental Design. This includes advice on the structural options available, acoustic considerations and resistance to wind forces. Standards of material quality and workmanship for particular forms of barrier structure are prescribed in the HMSO publication Specification for Highway Works, which sets out the standard requirements for motorway and trunk road construction contracts. In addition, contracts may either provide a complete design or specify that barriers are to be provided by the contractor to meet certain criteria. In either case, it is usual for designs to be required to conform to the Agency's published guidance. When specialist proprietary products are offered by contractors, evidence of the basis of their design and of their performance to the prescribed standard is required.

Noise mitigation barriers are prescribed in principle by location, length and height; various other characteristics may be provided for in particular contracts to prescribe quality and type of materials, structural form and acoustic properties. Some aspects of materials and functional properties are assessed prior to erection; others such as overall form, position and integrity are assessed during and after erection. For all procurement it is the contractor's responsibility to supervise the installation of barriers on site and to check their compliance with the contract under their quality assurance procedures. This supervision is backed up by arrangements which depend on the type of contract for vetting of proposals and inspection of their construction by the client's representative or the site agent.

Noise mitigation barriers are routinely inspected and maintained as part of the highway infrastructure and defects are rectified as and when necessary. In designing the appropriate form of barrier, the maintenance requirements and expected life of the proposed system are taken into account. Planned maintenance includes for the replacement of barriers at an appropriate time, as indicated by inspection reports.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will investigate whether the noise mitigation barriers between junctions 8 and 10 of the M25 meet the required design standards. [38302]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 23 July 1996:

As you know, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the noise mitigation barriers between junction 8 and 10 of the M25.

The barriers already in place meet the relevant design standards; those still to be provided will also be built to the same standard.

Airports

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what criteria were used to determine which airports were designated under section 40 of the Airports Act 1986; [37815]

(2) to what extent the criteria used to determine which airports were designated under section 40 of the Airports Act 1986 take account of trends in competition in the aviation industry following air service liberalisation in *(a)* Europe and *(b)* elsewhere; and if he will make a statement. [37819]

Mr. Norris: No formal criteria for the designation of airports are included in the Airports Act. However, the criteria that the Government consider relevant to designation are the market position, including extent of competition from other airports and other modes; prima facie evidence of excessive profitability or abuse of monopoly position; the scale and timing of investment, and their implications for profitability; and the efficiency and quality of service.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of staff currently employed at *(a)* Heathrow and *(b)* Gatwick airports. [39510]

Mr. Norris: These are matters for BAA plc.

Supplementary Grant

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers he has to grant transport supplementary grant in respect of only part of a proposed bypass where other parts are not expected to be constructed. [38921]

Mr. Norris: The power to pay transport supplementary grant is contained in sections 87 and 88 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. Guidance on bidding is issued annually, and copies are deposited in the Library—the latest is local authority circular 2/96. It is for local authorities to decide, and justify, what constitutes a viable scheme, and to bid for resources accordingly. All bids are considered competitively, on merit.

Rural Roads

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to improve safety on B, C and unclassified roads in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the annual proportion of accidents, fatalities and injuries that have occurred on such roads in recent years. [38948]

Mr. Norris: Safety on B, C and unclassified roads is the responsibility of the local highway authority. The wide range of Government measures to reduce accidents—including anti-drink driving and speeding campaigns, and measures to reduce young driver risk—influence drivers on all roads, and are reflected in the reduced numbers of accidents on non built-up B, C and unclassified roads. Fatal and serious injury accidents have fallen by 37 per cent. on these roads since the 1981 to 1985 baseline. Local highway authorities can improve the road layout at known accident blackspots and the Government have given £55 million this year to fund local safety schemes.

Casualties on non-built up B, C and unclassified roads in England and Wales in 1995 were:

Fatalities: 498

Seriously injured: 5,281

Slightly injured: 22,175

The proportion of Great Britain casualty accidents on non-built up B, C and unclassified roads has remained very stable—in 1994, it was 8.7 per cent., which was unchanged from the 1981 to 1985 baseline proportion.

Birmingham Relief Road

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce his decision on the public inquiry into the building of the Birmingham northern relief road. [39482]

Mr. Watts: The Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport will announce their decision as soon as possible after receiving the inspector's report, which is not expected before November this year.

Road Accidents (Fatigue)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to establish a research programme into the extent that fatigue influences road accidents. [39386]

Mr. Norris: Interim results from our research programme into the influence of fatigue on road accidents were announced last September; work continues on the appraisal of possible countermeasures and will report next year.

Bridges

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the bridge strengthening programme will be completed by 1999; and if it will be necessary to impose weight restrictions on strategically important bridges. [39265]

Mr. Watts: The bridge strengthening programme will continue for a number of years after 1999. We do not envisage that it will be necessary to impose weight restrictions on strategically important bridges.

Heavy Goods Vehicle Drivers

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the number of accidents involving newly qualified HGV drivers in the last year. [39337]

Mr. Norris: Information on heavy goods vehicle accidents is not available in this form. In 1995, HGV drivers aged between 21 and 24 were involved in 850 injury accidents.

MOT Certificates

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many MOT test certificates have been stolen in each of the last five years. [39338]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question on the number of MOT certificates stolen over the past 5 years.

Details of the number of MOT certificates stolen from garages are shown below:

1991/92: 113,361

1992/93: 160,666

1993/94: 170,000

1994/95: 60,868

1995/96: 51,694

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff were employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94. [39430]

Mr. Norris: The figures sought are as follows:

(a) (i) 9 full-time publicity officers

(a) (ii) 9 full-time publicity officers

(a) (iii) 9 full-time publicity officers

(b) (i) 20 full-time press officers

(b) (ii) 17 full-time press officers

(b) (iii) 19 full-time press officers

Staff in departmental agencies work on both publicity and press and media and cannot be broken down as requested. The figures are:

1995–96: 13.5

1994–95: 16.5

1993–94: 11.2

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff are assumed in his Department's budget to be employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, *(a)* to work on press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39474]

Mr. Norris: The following staff are employed in the Department.

(i) (a) 14 Full-time Press Officers

(ii) (a) 1 Part-time Press Officer

(i) (b) 7 Full-time Publicity Officers

(ii) (b) None

Staff departmental agencies work on both publicity and press and media and cannot be broken down as requested. There are 25 staff working in this area in the departmental agencies for 1996–97.

Working Time Directive

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to introduce United Kingdom legislation and promote compliance within the transport industry with the EU working time directive. [39388]

Mr. Norris: None. Transport industries are excluded from the scope of the directive.

Vehicle Relicensing (Post Offices)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he has taken since 1990 to increase the number of post offices contracted with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency for vehicle relicensing services; what measure he takes to ensure that the DVLA's estimates of costs in adding post offices to its contracted network are reasonable and accurate; and if he will make a statement. [38952]

Mr. Norris: The question of adding offices to the vehicle relicensing network and the cost forms part of the contractual arrangements between the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and Post Office Counters Ltd. These are currently under review as part of negotiations to agree a new contract. Since the last contract was let in 1989, some 400 offices have been added to the network. The current network of 4,000 vehicle relicensing post offices will be extended only if it can be shown to be cost-effective and does not merely add to the cost of collecting vehicle excise duty.

Motorway Accidents

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* accidents and *(b)* fatalities occurred on (i) the hard shoulder of motorways and (ii) in vehicles stationary on the hard shoulder in the last year. [39399]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Accidents and fatalities; on the motorway hard shoulder; GB 1995

Number

	Accidents	*Fatalities*
All accidents on the lay-by/hard shoulder[1]	150	11
Accidents involving a stationary vehicle on the lay-by/hard shoulder[2]	88	5

[1] Includes vehicles entering, on, or leaving the lay-by/hard shoulder.
[2] Involving a vehicle parked on the lay-by/hard shoulder.

Public Service Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to ensure that members of the public have access to details of prohibitions received by operators of public service vehicles. [39487]

Mr. Norris: We have recently completed a public consultation exercise on proposals for the Vehicle Inspectorate to make available on demand information about prohibitions issued by its examiners to both public service and heavy goods vehicle operators following roadside enforcement checks.

The consultation document also proposed the release of information about operator convictions and about annual roadworthiness tests for individual heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles.

We are currently considering the responses received during the consultation period.

Willerby 93

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what checks are being undertaken to ensure the financial standing and viability of the application for an operator licence submitted to the north eastern traffic area office in the name of Willerby 93; and if he plans to grant the licence. [39356]

Mr. Norris: The consideration of applications for operator licences is the responsibility of independent traffic commissioners. I have asked Mr. Keith Waterworth, the traffic commissioner for the north-eastern traffic area, to respond directly.

European Vignette System

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to join the European Vignette system. [39339]

Mr. Norris: None at present.

Drivers (Amnesties)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider introducing an amnesty from prosecution for those drivers who are prepared to confess their own breaches of the law where those breaches were encouraged or actively sought by the employer. [39375]

Mr. Norris: No.

Lyme Bay

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what additional resources he has allocated to the Coastguard agency to implement the recommendations of the inquiry into the Lyme bay tragedy. [39359]

Mr. Norris: None. The report of the inquiry stated that the recommendations could be implemented with the existing personnel and other resources of the Coastguard agency.

Civil Aviation Authority

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will commission an efficiency scrutiny of the Civil Aviation Authority; and if he will make a statement. [39460]

Mr. Norris: No. There are already a number of mechanisms in place in the Civil Aviation Authority to foster efficiency.

Recruitment Information

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information on recruitment his Department is required to publish; if he will make this information available for the Central Transport Group for 1995; and if he will make a statement. [39659]

Mr. Norris: The Civil Service Order in Council 1995 authorises the civil service commissioners to require departments and agencies to publish summary information about their recruitment and the use of permitted exceptions to the principles of fair and open competition and selection on merit.

The Central Transport Group is in the process of revising its systems for recruitment in the light of recent guidance laid down by the civil service commissioners, to ensure that recruitment is carried out on the basis of fair and open competition and selection on merit, and to make provision for internal audit.

The number of staff appointed to CTG in 1995 are shown in the table. There were no permitted exceptions to fair and open competition and selection on merit in 1995.

Recruitment statistics for the central transport group (CTG)—1 January to 31 December 1995

			Status		*Breakdown showing women, ethnic minority and people with disabilities successful at each level*		
Grade	*Number in grade 31 December 1995*	*Number of posts recruited 1 January to 31 December 1995*	*FTA*[1]	*Permanent*	*Female*	*Ethnic minority*	*Disability (male and female)*
G5	68	2	2	—	1	—	—
G7	271	2	2	—	—	—	—
EO	368	1	—	1	—	—	1 (male)
Administrative Trainee	12	9	—	9	4	—	—
AO	488	7	1	6	5	—	2 (male)
AA	155	14	9	5	7	—	5 (male)
PS	103	1	—	1	1	—	—
SGB2	16	1	—	1	—	—	1 (male)
Casual Students	5	6	6	—	3	—	—
Higher Scientific Officer	5	1	1	—	—	—	—
Economic Assistant	5	4	—	4	—	—	—
Assistance Information Officer	4	2	1	1	1	—	—
Total	1,500	50	22	28	22	0	9 (male)

[1] Fixed term appointment.

Traffic Areas (Restructuring)

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the proposed restructuring of the traffic areas. [39549]

Mr. Norris: A consultation paper setting out options was issued on 17 July. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Highways Agency

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Highways Agency annual report and accounts for 1995–96 will be published. [39612]

Mr. Watts: The Highways Agency annual report and accounts 1995–96 was published on Monday 22 July. Copies have been placed in the Library and are available on request from the Highways Agency.

Croydon Tramlink

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the Croydon Tramlink. [39614]

Mr. Norris: I am glad to report that I have authorised London Transport to finalise and then sign the concession agreement for Croydon Tramlink. This will mean that Tramtrack Croydon Ltd. will be able to build and operate the new system, which should open in the year 2000. The total central Government grant involved will be £125 million. Tramtrack Croydon Ltd. will also be making a significant financial contribution.

Croydon Tramlink will bring important benefits to public transport users in south London. It is an excellent example of how the Government's private finance initiative makes it possible to build projects which would not have been afforded if all the money had had to come from the taxpayer. I am delighted that, after careful negotiation, it has been possible to reach agreement between public and private sectors to take forward this worthwhile public transport scheme.

School Buses

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he has taken to end the three for two concession for school buses; and what action he is taking to ensure that local authorities comply with the guidance issued by his Department. [39486]

Mr. Norris: The three for two concession for seats on school buses for children over the age of five but under 14 years old no longer applies when seats are equipped with belts. The Department has not issued any guidance notes on the application of the three for two concession.

Regulation of Railways Act 1871

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to repeal and replace the

provision of the Regulation of Railways Act 1871 which sets up and publishes a report into railway accidents and if he will make a statement. [38544]

Mr. Watts: The Health and Safety Commission has recently undertaken a review of railway safety legislation, including the regulation of Railways Act 1871, and published its proposals in a consultative document. I await the commission's recommendations.

The Health and Safety at Works, etc. Act 1974 contains provisions under which accidents on the railway may be investigated and reports published.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the last 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39139]

Mr. Norris: The Government recognise the crucial role played by small firms in the UK economy and aim to help them by providing sound economic conditions—keeping inflation and interest rates low—by reducing legislative administrative and taxation burdens and, where appropriate, by providing direct assistance in the form of specialist advice and support and easing access to finance.

The recently published transport Green Paper recognised the central importance of maintaining a transport system that provides business with an efficient means of moving goods and raw materials around the country. The paper sets out the Government's assessment of the future for transport in the UK and the measures that need to be taken to meet the differing demands of the economy, the environment and the individual.

My Department has, like others, reviewed the regulations for which it is responsible to ensure that unnecessary or over burdensome regulation is cut back. When considering new regulations, we take particular account of the burden and cost regulations impose on small businesses.

Over the past 12 months, we have introduced measures to relax the regulation for signing tourist destinations. These now include provisions for signing of hotels, restaurants and tourist attractions which were previously excluded. We have also simplified the licensing arrangements for goods vehicle operators, 80 per cent. of whom run fewer than a total of four heavy goods vehicles. Previously, licences were granted for a maximum of four years at a time, but a system of continuous licensing is now in place.

Merchant Navy

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many United Kingdom residents presently hold valid UK Merchant Navy certificates of competency in the marine engineer classes *(a)* 1, *(b)* 2, *(c)* 3 and *(d)* 4; [38540]

(2) how many United Kingdom residents presently hold valid UK Merchant Navy certificates of competency in the deck officer classes *(a)* 1, *(b)* 2, *(c)* 3, *(d)* 4 and *(e)* 5; [38539]

(3) how many Merchant Navy certificates of equivalent competency have been issued. [38555]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Questions about the number of UK residents who currently hold valid UK Merchant Navy Certificates of Competency in Marine Engineer and Deck Officer classes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, and the number of Certificates of Equivalent Competency which have been issued since they were introduced.

I regret that I cannot answer your two questions about UK residents holding certificates of competency because the information is not held in the form requested and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

In answer to your third question, 26 Certificates of Equivalent Competency have been issued since they were introduced on 1 August 1995.

New Roads

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance is issued by his Department to local authorities and developers in respect of carriageway traffic flow rates for new roads. [38991]

Mr. Norris: The Department of Transport does not issue specific guidance on traffic flow rates for local authority roads. The Highways Agency's design manual for roads and bridges contains guidance on traffic flows on trunk roads. It is open to local authorities to determine the extent to which this guidance is relevant to their own road schemes.

A46/A47 Link Road

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of the £3.462 million spent on the Leicester A46/A47 was for stage 1 design and construction. [38919]

Mr. Norris: There is no requirement for the expenditure figures to be split between stages 1 and 2 and this information is not held by my Department. When the A46/A47 link road scheme was first accepted for transport supplementary grant it was for the entire scheme. The phasing of the scheme is entirely a matter for the local authority, Leicestershire county council.

Airside Facilities

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will extend the scope of relevant activities as defined in the Airports Act 1986 to include the monopoly provision of airside facilities to airlines; and if he will make a statement. [39459]

Mr. Norris: Section 41 of the Airports Act 1986 empowers the Civil Aviation Authority to impose conditions on an airport if it considers that any unfair trade practices, or exploitation of the airport operators's bargaining position, are taking place in respect of any

"relevant activities". The provision of airside facilities to airlines is deemed to be a "relevant activity" according to the definition in section 36 of that Act.

Light Goods Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to ensure that professional drivers of LGV's have adequate rest and refreshment facilities at affordable prices. [39373]

Mr. Norris: Motorway service areas have to contain designated number of parking spaces for lorries which can be used free of charge for at least two hours. Elsewhere, it is for commercial interests to decide, subject to planning permission, what facilities to provide and where, for lorry drivers as for other road users.

Airlines

Mrs Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will initiate a review of the regulatory requirements imposed by the Civil Aviation Authority on United Kingdom carriers with particular reference to costs to airlines. [39505]

Mr. Norris: No. The Civil Aviation Authority already takes account of the coats to industry in developing regulatory requirements.

Trucks

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the findings of his review of 44 tonnes operation; and what estimate he has made of the number of 44 tonne trucks currently operating. [39497]

Mr. Norris: We are considering the findings of the review. At the end of 1995, 713 six-axled vehicles were licensed to operate at up to 44 tonnes.

Heathrow and Gatwick Airports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the percentage of delays which are attributable to runway slot limitations at Heathrow and Gatwick airports. [39513]

Mr. Norris: This is a matter for the operator of the airports, BAA plc.

Tachographs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what proposals he has to ensure that tachographs record a full 24-hour day; [39377]

(2) if he will consider introducing a unique serial number on tachograph discs. [39376]

Mr. Norris: The Government share concerns that the records produced by drivers should be accurate. However, the requirements on drivers to record their time and the layout of approved records sheets are set out in an EU regulation. I am not convinced that amendment to the regulation along the lines proposed would be cost-effective or free of practical difficulties. We favour the use of digital recording equipment and drivers smartcards, as proposed by the European Commission, to overcome the acknowledged shortcomings of mechanical recording equipment.

Working Environment

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to promote better working environments in the transport industry; and if he will make a statement. [39397]

Mr. Norris: The Department of Transport pursues a number of initiatives which contribute to improved working environments in the transport industry, including enforcement of drivers' hours legislation and advice to operators on the protection from assault of bus crews.

Transport and Tourism

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment his Department has made of the total number of jobs related directly and indirectly to transport and tourism; [39503]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the total earnings to the United Kingdom economy from transport and tourism. [39502]

Mr. Norris: The latest assessment of the contribution of transport to the UK economy are given in an article "Transport in the Economy" published in the 1994 edition of "Transport Statistics Great Britain". My Department does not make assessment for tourism.

Smoke Hoods

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to introduce compulsory smoke hoods for passenger aircraft. [39547]

Mr. Norris: A Civil Aviation Authority study has shown that, in many circumstances, the time required for passengers to don unfamiliar smoke hoods could delay the evacuation of aircraft. The authority therefore has no proposals to require the provision of smoke hoods. However, the authority will keep under review all technical developments in smoke hoods and other survival techniques.

Air Transport Industry

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action his Department is taking to improve the competitiveness of the air transport industry in the United Kingdom. [39499]

Mr. Norris: My Department seeks the liberalisation of international air service arrangements wherever possible so as to increase competitive opportunities for UK airlines and UK airports.

Airbags (Child Seats)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance he has given about the use of child seats in the front seats of cars where an airbag is fitted. [39252]

Mr. Norris: The Department's advice is that rear-facing child seats must not be fitted to front seats of cars where an air bag is fitted and this message is contained in the publicly available "Choosing Safety" booklet. Following agreement between the Department and manufacturers, all new vehicles fitted with passenger side airbags and sold in the UK since 1 January 1996 have been voluntarily fitted with a warning label. In addition, the owner's handbook has carried further explanation of the dangers. The Department is continuing discussions with the UK motor industry to ensure that the public are fully aware of the dangers.

Children (Road Deaths)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the death rate for children killed on the roads *(a)* other than in cars and *(b)* as passengers in cars per 1,000 child population in each of the last five years and for each EU country; and in the case of *(b)* what was the percentage of deaths where the children were not using seat belts. [39278]

Mr. Norris: Available information for EU member countries is shown in the table. No information is available on unbelted child passenger fatalities.

Fatality rate per 100,000 population for children aged 0 to 14

	1994		1993		1992		1991		1990	
	Pedestrian	car passenger	Pedestrian	car passenger	Pedestrian	car passenger	Pedestrian	car passenger	Pedestrian	car passenger
Austria	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.3	2.7	1.6	2.2
Belgium	1.1	1.3	0.8	1.5	2.1	1.3	1.7	0.9	1.9	2.2
Denmark	0.7	1.2	0.9	0.5	0.9	0.8	1.9	1.6	1.4	1.7
Finland	0.9	1.6	0.7	1.2	1.7	1.0	0.4	2.2	1.1	1.4
France	1.0	1.8	0.9	2.0	1.2	2.0	1.4	2.1	1.5	2.2
Germany	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.3	1.2	1.6	1.4	1.5	1.5	1.8
Great Britain	1.3	0.7	1.4	0.7	1.6	0.5	2.0	0.6	2.2	0.8
Greece			1.5	1.6	1.6	1.2	1.5	1.3	2.2	1.5
Ireland	1.7	0.5	1.9	1.3	1.8	0.8	2.4	0.8	2.4	1.0
Italy							0.9		0.6	1.0
Luxembourg										
Netherlands	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.9	0.8	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.8
Portugal			5.2	2.3	5.0	2.8	6.4	2.3	5.0	2.3
Spain	1.1	1.7	1.3	1.9	1.0	2.5	1.4	2.2	1.5	2.7
Sweden	0.8	0.9	0.4	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.5	1.2	0.9	1.1

Child Car Seats

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance he has given in relation to the type and use of child car seats. [39251]

Mr. Norris: Guidance for the public on the type and use of child car seats is contained in the publications "Seat Belts and the Law" and "Choosing Safety". Both of these publications are produced by the Department of Transport and I have arranged for copies to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Flight Guarantees

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will require travel agents and tour operators to advise passengers at the time of booking a flight or flight-inclusive holiday, if there is a guaranteed and identifiable carrier authorised to operate from the United Kingdom and with guaranteed flight slots; and if he will make a statement. [39508]

Mr. Norris: No. Tour operators are already required by the terms of their air travel organiser's licence to inform customers before entering into a contract either which airline will operate the flight or that this information is not available. If customers are informed of the intended operator, they must also be told whether they can cancel their contract without penalty in the event of any subsequent change.

Airports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will extend the power of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to review the conduct of individual airports under the Airports Act 1986 to allow a review of the conduct of the owner of groups of airports; and if he will make a statement. [39504]

Mr. Norris: No. Groups of airports can already be designated under section 40 of the Act for regular review by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. No separate need is seen to extend the MMC's powers to review the conduct of the owner of a group of airports.

Safety Evaluations

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he intends to extend safety case evaluations applied to the channel tunnel to other forms of public transport. [39394]

Mr. Norris: The safety case approach is already used where appropriate in a number of industries, for example rail and aviation. I will consider the extension of the safety case approach where I am satisfied that this is an appropriate way to maintain and improve safety standards for the transport mode concerned.

MV Derbyshire

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the date of the forthcoming expedition to the wreck of the MV Derbyshire; and how long he expects the expedition to last; [39466]

(2) if he will give the Derbyshire Families Association access to the complete raw data that will be brought back from his Department's expedition to the wreck of the MV Derbyshire; [39464]

(3) when he expects to publish the findings of the expedition to the wreck of the MV Derbyshire. [39465]

Mr. Norris: The phase 1 expedition to the wreck of the Derbyshire departed on 22 July and is expected to return on 29 July.

The data recovered will be first fully considered by the technical assessors, who will be consulting widely on their findings and intentions. The raw data will later be available to all interested parties, including the Derbyshire Families Association.

A full report of the assessors findings will be published after the completion of phase 2.

Seat Belts (Coaches)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to ensure that seat belts fitted to coaches are fitted to the correct specifications; and what action he is taking to ensure that his Department monitors the correct fitting of seat belts. [39489]

Mr. Norris: The safety of equipment and its fitting must ultimately remain the responsibility of the installer. We intend to issue guidelines in support of the legislation and are exploring options for checking installations at the annual test. We are also considering other safeguards, but they can be of only a limited nature.

Lap Straps (Coaches)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to introduce the compulsory fitting of inertia lap straps aboard buses and coaches carrying school children. [39488]

Mr. Norris: None.

Accident Investigations

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to implement the recent recommendations by the Consumers Association for an independent accident investigation body; and if he will make a statement. [39395]

Mr. Norris: We have rigorous independent mechanisms for investigating accidents, specifically for each transport mode. Transport is a diverse and international business and it makes sense to have separate bodies while ensuring a regular communication between them. I do not believe that an overarching safety investigation authority would add value.

Drivers' Hours

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce further United Kingdom legislation on drivers' hours following his Department's consultation exercise in 1993. [39398]

Mr. Norris: The consultation in 1993 was part of a wider exercise to identify unnecessary or overly burdensome regulations. I announced on 5 September 1995 that I was not convinced that the domestic drivers' hours rules imposed a significant burden on industry and that I had concluded after careful consideration that any relaxation of the rules would not be in the best interests of road safety, which is my chief priority.

Runway Capacity

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the runway capacity in the south-east—RUCATSE—recommendation that a new runway in the south-east of England is equivalent to five years' traffic growth. [39512]

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 20 June 1996, *Official Report*, column *534*.

Traffic Congestion

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate his Department has made of the cost of traffic congestion to British industry in each of the last 10 years. [39490]

Mr. Norris: The Department has not made estimates of the total cost of traffic congestion to British industry. At a national level, such costs are very difficult to identify. Others have made estimates of the cost of congestion in this country on the basis of work carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development some six years ago. However, the method used contains a number of gross simplifications and the results are consequently unreliable.

Our own assessments have focused on the appraisal of individual transport projects. They start from the baseline of current conditions and estimate the reduction in costs in the area concerned that can be achieved by implementing the project. These estimates are based on an extensive body of research findings.

Fishing Vessels

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fishing vessels of under 7m in length are registered in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* each other European Union country; and if he will make a statement [39163]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mrs. Margaret Ewing, dated 25 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of fishing vessels under seven metres in length registered in (a) the United Kingdom and, (b) each other European Union country.

The number of fishing vessels under seven metres in length registered in the United Kingdom is 3074. I regret that this Agency does not hold information on similar sized vessels registered in other European Union countries.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Racially Motivated Crimes (London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many racially motivated crimes in the Greater London area were reported in the first six months of 1996. [37787]

Mr. Maclean: The available information has been supplied by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. There were 2,741 racial incidents reported to the Metropolitan police service in the first six months of 1996. This figure represents all racial incidents reported including those that do not have a crime element associated with them.

Money Laundering

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of incidents of money laundering referred to the National Criminal Intelligence Service for each year since its inception indicating the sources of information and the number of referrals about and from *(a)* accountants and *(b)* lawyers. [37824]

Mr. Maclean: All disclosures of suspicious financial transactions made under the money laundering legislation are passed to the financial intelligence and money laundering section of the National Criminal Intelligence Service—NCIS. The total number of disclosures made for each year since the inception of NCIS in April 1992 are as follows:

Year	*Disclosures*
1992	11,281
1993	12,750
1994	15,007
1995	13,710
1996 (to date)	7,416

Information about the number of disclosures made that relate to solicitors or accountants is not held centrally. However, the number of disclosures made by solicitors and accountants are as follows:

Year	*Solicitors*	*Accountants*
1992	4	1
1993	4	2
1994	86	6
1995	213	44
1996 (to date)	168	34

Other sources of disclosures cannot be retrieved easily for each of the years in question. However, in 1995 the sources of disclosures were:

Origin of disclosure	*Percentage of total*
Banks and building societies	80
Insurance companies	5
Bureau de change	4
Solicitors and accountants	2
Independent financial advisers	1
Credit/debit companies	0.5
Industry regulators	0.1
Other sources accounting for less than 1 per cent. each (e.g. car/boat salesman)	7

Criminal Offences (Staffordshire)

Mr. Brian David Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people were *(a)* cautioned and *(b)* convicted in court of committing a criminal offence in Staffordshire in the latest year for which figures are available (i) in total and (ii) broken down to show those aged under (1) 16, (2) 21 and (3) 25 years; [37887]

(2) how many people convicted of criminal offences in Staffordshire for the latest year for which figures are available were *(a)* registered unemployed and *(b)* without employment. [37888]

Mr. Maclean: Information for 1994, the latest available, on the number of persons cautioned and convicted by age group in the Staffordshire area is given in the table.

Information on the employment status of defendants appearing before the courts is not recorded centrally.

Number of offenders cautioned and convicted at all courts in Staffordshire Police Force Area by age and type of offence 1994

Age/disposal	*Indictable offences*	*Summary non-motoring offences*	*All offences excluding summary motoring*
Aged 10 and under 16			
Cautioned	1,685	453	2,138
Convicted	365	103	468
Total	2,050	556	2,606
Aged 16 and under 21			
Cautioned	860	372	1,232
Convicted	1,872	944	2,816
Total	2,732	1,316	4,048
Aged 21 and under 25			
Cautioned	359	147	506
Convicted	1,290	1,283	2,573
Total	1,649	1,430	3,079
All ages			
Cautioned	4,010	1,398	5,408
Convicted	6,110	8,720	14,830
Total	10,120	10,118	20,238

Detective Inspector Gladding

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Chief Constable of Gloucester on what disciplinary action has been taken against Detective Inspector Gladding following the comments in the Appeal Court in the case of R. *v.* Mills and Poole; and if he will make a statement. [38183]

Mr. Maclean: No disciplinary action has been taken. The Police Complaints Authority announced in March 1993, following a full investigation by the then assistant chief constable of Thames Valley, that there was no evidence to justify disciplinary proceedings against any officers in the case.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers, and from which countries, have had their applications considered under the short procedure from *(a)* 15 March 1995 until 27 November 1995, *(b)* 27 November 1995 until 20 March 1996 and *(c)* 20 March 1996 to the latest convenient date; how many of these applications in each period were (i) granted, (ii) refused and (iii) transferred to the full procedure. [38429]

Mr. Kirkhope: The requested information on short procedure applications is given in the tables. Over the period 15 May 1995 to 30 June 1996, there were 5,735 refusals and three grants of asylum from short procedure applications. As at 30 June, there were 996 cases still under consideration. Information on cases transferred is available only at disproportionate cost.

Short procedure applications, by nationality, 15 May–30 November 1995

	Number
Nigeria	528
India	255
Pakistan	221
Romania	143
Ghana	138
Poland	45
Algeria	15
Kenya	14
Tanzania	11
Uganda	11
Gambia	6
Bulgaria	6
Columbia	4
Sri Lanka	3
Zaire	2
Ivory Coast	2
Zimbabwe	2
Others	11
Total	1,417

Short procedure applications, by nationality, 1 December 1995–31 March 1996

	Number
Nigeria	618
India	451
Pakistan	322
Algeria	310
Ghana	205
Poland	78
Sierra Leone	74
Romania	66
Gambia	53
Turkey	50
Bulgaria	45
Sri Lanka	39
Bangladesh	29
Kenya	26
Ivory Coast	25

Short procedure applications, by nationality, 1 December 1995–31 March 1996

	Number
Tanzania	16
Zaire	14
Lithuania	13
Columbia	8
Slovakia	8
Cyprus	7
Jamaica	7
Ethiopia	6
China	5
Angola	5
Czech Republic	5
Cameroon	4
Uganda	3
Zimbabwe	3
Russia	3
Brazil	3
Guyana	3
Hungary	3
Sudan	2
Eritrea	2
Estonia	2
Peru	2
Others	19
Total	2,534

Short procedure applications, by nationality, 1 April–30 June 1996

	Number
Nigeria	528
Pakistan	314
India	292
Algeria	203
Ghana	194
Sir Lanka	173
Columbia	113
China	93
Sierra Leone	85
Romania	79
Turkey	75
Poland	69
Lithuania	54
Bangladesh	52
Bulgaria	50
Gambia	45
Zaire	45
Ecuador	36
Cyprus	25
Angola	22
Russia	16
Sudan	16
Ukraine	16
Zimbabwe	15
Ivory Coast	11
Tanzania	11
Jamaica	11
Kenya	10
Lebanon	10
Uganda	9
Cameroon	9
Ethiopia	8
Congo	8
Togo	7
Slovakia	6
Eritrea	6
South Africa	6
Burundi	5

Short procedure applications, by nationality, 1 April–30 June 1996

	Number
Egypt	5
Philippines	5
Brazil	2
Estonia	2
Gabon	2
Kuwait	2
Benin	2
Cuba	2
Honduras	2
Sengal	2
Others	30
Total	2,783

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases for the last year for which figures are available an in-country asylum application led to an applicant being issued with a visitor visa to Britain. [39034]

Mr. Kirkhope: The requested information is not available.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has issued to the immigration and nationality department on the treatment of applications for asylum in the United Kingdom by an Iranian national who leaves Iran legally; and if he will make a statement. [38961]

Mr. Kirkhope: It is understood that stringent checks are in place at airports in Iran, making it difficult for a person of interest to the authorities there to leave with a passport in their own identity. This situation is taken into account when applications for asylum from Iranians are considered, but each case is considered individually on its merits under the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees, and asylum or exceptional leave is granted in appropriate cases.

Violence

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in percentage terms the main causes of injury in incidents of violence against persons in the last available year. [38324]

Mr. Maclean: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available relates to offences of homicide and firearms offences. Statistics on offences currently recorded as homicide by apparent method of killing are published in table 4.3. of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 1994". Table 3.8 of the same publication gives figures for overall notifiable offences in which firearms were reported to have caused injury. A copy of the Criminal Statistics publication is available in the Library.

Ban Glasses (Injury)

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the compensation awarded annually by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board to victims of injuries caused by bar glasses. [38323]

Mr. Maclean: The board comments that a significant number of injuries are known to arise from incidents in public houses and similar places, but no estimate is available of the amounts paid to victims of bar glass injuries.

Immigration Rules

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been (i) granted and (ii) refused (1) entry clearance, (2) leave to enter the United Kingdom and (3) leave to remain in the United Kingdom in 1994, 1995 and 1996 to the latest convenient date under the provisions of paragraphs 169–75 of the Consolidated Immigration Rules, HC 395 of Session 1994–95 as *(x)* ministers of religion, *(y)* missionaries and *(z)* members of religious orders. [38426]

Mr. Kirkhope: I will write to the hon. Member.

Stalking

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he proposes to recommend to the chief constable one of whose serving officers has been said, by a presiding judge, to have stalked a neighbour. [38744]

Mr. Maclean: None. The matter is entirely for the chief constable to consider.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total public expenditure *(a)* in each of the last available five years and *(b)* in total over the last five years, in constant prices, on the identification of alternatives to the use of animals for scientific testing. [37519]

Mr. Sackville: The research into alternatives to the use of animals in scientific procedures for which the Home Office is responsible is that granted through the Animal Procedures Committee

(a) In each of the last five years this has amounted to:

1991–92: £215.000

1992–93: £253.000

1993–94: £308,000

1994–95: £273,000

1995–96: £253,000

(b) The total expenditure over the last five years, in constant 1995–96 prices, is £1,365,309.

Police Numbers

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list for each of the last five years, as at 31 March, for *(a)* each borough and *(b)* the Metropolitan police as a whole, (i) the population and (ii) the number of officers per 10,000 population; [38282]

(2) if he will list for each of the last five years, as at 31 March, for *(a)* each division, *(b)* each borough and *(c)* the Metropolitan police as a whole, the number of police officers. [38281]

Mr. Maclean: A borough/divisional breakdown is available only using current strength figures; historical borough/divisional strength is not recorded. The other information requested is as follows:

Borough and division	*Current police strength (as at 18 July 1996)*	*Population (as at 30 June 1994)*	*Number of officers per 10,000 population*
Barking and Dagenham	304.45	155,018	19.6
Dagenham	304.45		
Barnet and Hertsmere	751.81	308,300	24.4
Barnet and Hertsmere	293.26		
Golders Green	223.3		
West Hendon	235.25		
Bexley	293.05	220,432	13.3
Bexleyheath	293.05		
Brent	626.3	244,467	26.6
Wembley	268.6		
Willesden Green	357.7		
Bromley	474.14	293,019	16.2
Bromley and Orpington	474.14		
Camden	696.26	182,448	38.1
Hampstead	208.6		
Holborn	201.8		
Kentish Town	285.86		
City of Westminster	1,702.76	190,743	89.3
Belgravia	294.06		
Charing Cross	401.4		
Marylebone	332.3		
Paddington	352		
West End Central	323		
Croydon	614.74	326,736	18.8
Croydon	288.36		
South Norwood	326.38		
Ealing	635.52	289,793	21.9
Ealing	347.03		
Southall	288.49		
Enfield	543.88	259,773	20.9
Edmonton	261.78		
Enfield	282.1		
Greenwich	623.45	212,332	29.4
Greenwich	296.5		
Plumstead	326.95		
Hackney	667.14	192,492	34.7
Stoke Newington	346.34		
Shoreditch and Hackney	320.8		
Hammersmith and Fulham	535.18	156,597	34.2
Fulham	206.73		
Hammersmith	328.45		
Haringey	528.1	212,332	24.9
Hornsey	267.4		
Tottenham	260.7		
Harrow	292.6	210,308	13.9
Harrow	292.6		
Havering	366.65	231,706	15.8
Havering	366.65		
Hillingdon	428.6	243,387	17.6
Hillingdon	428.6		
Hounslow	861.89	202,790	42.5
Chiswick	202.2		
Hounslow	272.7		
Heathrow Airport	386.99		
Islington	546	175,203	31.2
Holloway	259.9		
Islington	286.1		
Kensington and Chelsea	635.1	150,237	42.3
Brompton	384.7		
Notting Hill	250.4		
Kingston upon Thames	384.44	138,522	27.8
Kingston	384.44		
Lambeth	974.75	260,763	37.4
Brixton	323.7		
Streatham	277.71		
Vauxhall	373.34		
Lewisham	625	242,472	25.8
Catford	289.4		
Lewisham	335.6		
Merton	320.05	177,259	18.1
Wimbledon	320.05		
Newham	633.88	226,850	27.9
Forest Gate	323.48		
Plaistow	310.4		
Redbridge	545.5	225,102	24.2
Ilford	249.6		
Barkingside	295.9		
Richmond upon Thames	306.65	172,035	17.8
Twickenham	306.65		
Southwark	1,020.36	228,767	44.6
Peckham	374.38		
Southwark	373.88		
Walworth	272.1		
Sutton	418.43	173,376	24.1
Epsom and Sutton	418.43		

Borough and division	Current police strength (as at 18 July 1996)	Population (as at 30 June 1994)	Number of officers per 10,000 population
Tower Hamlets	607.4	170,549	35.6
Limehouse	268		
Bethnal Green	339.4		
Waltham Forest	472	221,790	21.2
Chingford	239.1		
Leyton	232.9		
Wandsworth	659.28	266,721	24.7
Battersea	302.9		
Wandsworth	356.38		

Year	Number of police officers (Metropolitan Police as a whole) as at 31 March	Population as at 30 June	Number of officers per 10,000 population
1992	28,154	7,387,272	38.1
1993	27,867	7,419,854	37.6
1994	27,699	7,456,173	37.1
1995	27,480	7,456,173	36.9
1996	27,342	7,456,173	36.7

The Surrey element of the population for divisions that straddle London boroughs and Surrey cannot be differentiated and is not included in the population figures.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of police officers per 10,000 population in *(a)* inner London, *(b)* outer London and *(c)* surrounding counties. [38284]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is as follows:

	Number of officers per 10,000 population
Inner London	[1]40
Outer London	[1]22.6
Thames Valley	[2]18.5
Essex	[2]19.5
Herts	[2]20.5
Kent	[2]20.5
Surrey	[2]21.5

[1] Metropolitan Police figures as at 18 July using the population count supplied by Office for National Statistics as at June 1994.
[2] HMIC figures for surrounding counties are correct as at March 1996.

The figures for London exclude officers based at headquarters departments on area and in portfolio units; and in holding branch. The figures for outer London include divisions which cover parts of the Metropolitan police district outside the London boroughs; and exclude Spelthorne division, which falls wholly within Surrey.

Metropolitan Police Budgets

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what basis budgets within the Metropolitan police are allocated to divisions. [38283]

Mr. Maclean: The allocation of budgets to individual divisions within the Metropolitan police is a matter for the commissioner and his senior colleagues. I understand that the process is supported by a resource allocation formula which seeks to direct resources in line with objective measures of need and in line with the five core territorial policing functions—traffic, crime, response, partnership and the Queen's peace—undertaken by the Metropolitan police. Headquarters' branches and corporate projects are not funded under the resource allocation formula but receive funding separately through "top slicing".

Theft Act

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will propose amendments to the Theft Act 1968 to reverse the decision in Regina *v.* Preddy to the effect that a transfer of funds between bank accounts is not a transfer of property. [38221]

Mr. Maclean: The Government are committed to introducing legislation to combat loan fraud, as proposed by the Law Commission in its report, "Conspiracy to Defraud" (Law Comm 228), at the earliest possible opportunity.

Operation Bumblebee

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give for each quarter since Operation Bumblebee was first launched the number of *(a)* people arrested, *(b)* those arrested who were charged, *(c)* those charged who were prosecuted and *(d)* those prosecuted who were found guilty from a (i) guilty plea and (ii) not-guilty plea. [38290]

Mr. Maclean: Detailed information on arrest and the number of people charged is not collected centrally and information regarding plea data is not available.

The table shows the number and percentage of defendants prosecuted and convicted of offences of domestic burglary in the Metropolitan police area from June 1993 to December 1994—latest available.

Number of defendants prosecuted at magistrates courts and found guilty at all courts for offences of domestic burglary in the Metropolitan police area by quarter from April 1993 to December 1994

	1993			1994			
	April-June	July-September	October-December	January-March	April-June	July-September	October-December
Prosecutions = 100 per cent.	1,024	1,048	1,039	1,024	1,019	1,017	991
Convictions							
Number	619	674	656	616	615	681	607
Per cent.	60	64	63	60	60	67	61

The majority of cases held in the earlier part of the period will involve offences committed prior to the instigation of Operation Bumblebee across the Metropolitan police area in June 1993.

Buckley Hall Prison

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the annual report of the board of visitors for the year ended 31 December 1995, what plans he has to replace the integral bars in the living accommodation of HM prison Buckley Hall to prevent self-harm by prisoners. [38349]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 23 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about plans to replace the integral bars in the living accommodation at Buckley Hall prison to prevent self-harm by prisoners.

There are no plans to replace the integral bars in the living accommodation at Buckley Hall prison.

Young Offenders

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are currently available to deal with persistent young offenders; and if he will make a statement. [38681]

Mr. Maclean: The courts have a wide range of powers to deal with persistent young offenders aged 10 to 17 years. These can include community sentences as well as powers to involve parents of offenders. More particularly, courts may impose long terms of detention on 10 to 17-year-olds, up to an adult maximum, for grave offences. courts may also impose sentences of detention in a young offender institution for up to two years for any other imprisonable offence if the young person is at least 15 years old. The Government will also be introducing a new secure training order which will provide a vigorous regime based on care, discipline and education for persistent young offenders aged 12 to 14 years.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of young offenders *(a)* reoffended and *(b)* reoffended with a more serious offence in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [38682]

Miss Widdecombe: With respect to *(a)* the recent information on reoffending of young offenders relates to a sample of young offenders discharged from prison in 1992. Within two years of discharge, 72 per cent. of the males and 51 per cent. of the females had been reconvicted for a standard list offence.

With respect to *(b)* there is no standard classification of offences, according to their seriousness. Information has, however, been published that relates the type of offence for which offenders were originally convicted with the offence at first reconviction. Table 10.8 in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales 1994" (Cm 3087) contains information on the percentage of first reconvictions in various offence type categories for male young offenders. A copy of this publication has been placed in the Library.

Alcohol Prohibition Orders

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) in how many local authority areas orders prohibiting the public consumption of alcohol in specified places have been made, in each of the last five years; [38947]

(2) what representations he has received from *(a)* the Police Federation, *(b)* the Association of Chief Police Officers and *(c)* local authority associations regarding the effectiveness of measures to prohibit the public consumption of alcohol in specified areas; and if he will make a statement. [38946]

Mr. Sackville: Annual figures are not available, but since its introduction in 1990 33 local authorities have adopted the byelaw which prohibits the consumption of alcohol in designated places.

No representations have been received about its effectiveness.

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were prosecuted under byelaws prohibiting the public consumption of alcohol in specified places in each of the last four years in England. [38945]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested cannot be identified separately from other summary offences.

Mohammed Riaz

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when a decision is to be taken on the transfer of Mohammed Riaz currently detained in Her Majesty's prison Frankland to a category B prison; and if he will make a statement. [38957]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Max Madden, dated 23 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about when Mohammed Riaz, who is imprisoned at Frankland prison, will be transferred to a category B prison.

Mr. Riaz is serving life imprisonment having been convicted of murder and false imprisonment in 1984. Since 1990, he has been considered a category B prisoner and, like most prisoners of his categorisation at this stage of a life sentence, he is held at a dispersal prison which holds both category A and category B prisoners.

In line with normal arrangements for the regular assessment of life sentenced prisoners, Mr. Riaz's allocation will be considered further in August. I cannot at this stage say whether or when he will be considered as suitable for transfer to a category B prison.

Betting and Gaming (Deregulation)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated annual saving to private business and to public funds for the Deregulation (Gaming Machines and Betting Office Facilities) Order. [39155]

Mr. Kirkhope: The industry estimates that the new all cash amusement with prizes machines, and jackpot machines in casinos, will generate £9 million to

£14 million additional profits and at least £2 million in taxes. Estimates are not available of the effect of the other provisions.

Drugs

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action the Government propose in respect of the import of *(a)* khat, *(b)* gammahydroxybutyrate and *(c)* "cake" to the United Kingdom. [38968]

Mr. Sackville: Neither the khat plant nor the substances gammahydroxybutyrate—GHB—or "cake", which we understand refers to 3,4-methylenedioxy-N-benzylamphetamine, are controlled under the international United Nations drug conventions or under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs considered the misuse of khat in 1988 and advised that there was no evidence of a social problem arising from its misuse in the United Kingdom such as to justify bringing the plant under the controls of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. We have no current plan to bring khat under legislative controls but will continue to monitor the position.

The misuse of GHB is to be review by the advisory council at its next meeting in November.

We are not aware of any reports of misuse in the United Kingdom of the substance known as "cake" but the advisory council nevertheless has under review the question whether this and a number of similar substances should be brought within the scope of the 1971 Act.

Detention at Her Majesty's Pleasure

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedural changes will be made following the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights of 21 February in Singh and Hussain concerning the release of prisoners sentenced to be detained during Her Majesty's pleasure. [39718]

Mr. Howard: Prisoners detained during Her Majesty's pleasure who have served a period adequate to satisfy the requirements of retribution and deterrence, have their cases reviewed periodically by the Parole Board. At present, responsibility for their release rests with the Secretary of State. This responsibility cannot be conferred on the Parole Board or any other body without primary legislation.

As an interim measure, I have decided to change the administrative arrangements for the review and release of such prisoners. These administrative arrangements will apply to all such prisoners whose next Parole Board review begins on or after 1 August 1996. The changes will mean that these prisoners may have legal representation and an oral hearing before the Parole Board. They will also then be able to examine and cross examine witnesses. They will normally receive full disclosure of all material relevant to the question of whether they should be released.

If, at that review, the Parole Board favours the release of a prisoner, I will normally accept such a recommendation. My consideration of all such cases remains subject to consultation with the judiciary, as required by section 35(2) of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

The Singh and Hussain judgments affect only the process by which the decision is made on whether to release prisoners sentenced to be detained during Her Majesty's pleasure. They do not relate to the period of detention which such prisoners must serve to satisfy the requirements of retribution and deterrence, or Parole Board reviews which take place before the end of that period.

There will be no change to the dates set for Parole Board reviews of prisoners who have served that period, other than in the very small number of cases where I rejected the board's recommendation for release at the last review. Such cases will, exceptionally, be referred back to the Parole Board for early consideration under the new arrangements.

Hong Kong

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Governor of Hong Kong has submitted a further report on the discharge of his functions under the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act 1990. [39720]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Governor of Hong Kong submitted his fifth report to my right hon. and learned Friend on 3 July. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Extra-territorial Jurisdiction

Mr. Alison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the outcome of the review of policy on extra-territorial jurisdiction; and if he will make a statement. [39721]

Mr. Howard: I am today publishing the report of the review which I set up with the agreement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. A copy has been placed in the Library. The review advised against any general extension of extra-territorial jurisdiction because of the implications which so substantial an extension of jurisdiction would have for the procedures and rules of evidence of the United Kingdom courts. It recommended, however, in favour of the adoption of a set of policy guidelines, against which proposals for taking extra-territorial jurisdiction over individual offences committed abroad by British citizens and residents should be judged. These are:

- where the offence is serious (this might be defined, in respect of existing offences, by reference to the length of sentence currently available);
- where, by virtue of the nature of the offence, the witnesses and evidence necessary for the prosecution are likely to be available in the United Kingdom territory, even though the offence was committed outside the jurisdiction;
- where there is international consensus that certain conduct is reprehensible and that concerted action is needed involving the taking of extra-territorial jurisdiction;

where the vulnerability of the victim makes it particularly important to be able to tackle instances of the offence;

where it appears to be in the interest of the standing and reputation of the United Kingdom in the international community;

where there is a danger that offences would otherwise not be justifiable.

Meeting any of the guidelines would not mean automatically that jurisdiction would be taken, but it would be established a prima facie case for considering the issue further.

The review also recommended in favour of the assumption of jurisdiction over acts of conspiracy and incitement committed in this country in respect of offences abroad. I and my colleagues have accepted both of these recommendations.

The review further advised that sexual offences committed against children abroad satisfied a number of the criteria in the guidelines and, in the light of that, we have decided that we should take extra-territorial jurisdiction over such offences.

Legislation to give effect to the proposals for conspiracy and incitement and child sex tourism will be brought forward at the earliest possible opportunity.

Metropolitan Police (Information Technology)

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recent report by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary on information technology provision in the Metropolitan police. [39719]

Mr. Maclean: Yes. I have today placed in the Library a note of the recommendations from the report, together with the commissioner's response and the police authority responses, which take into account the advice my right hon. and learned Friend and I have received from the Metropolitan Police Committee.

Firearms Amnesty

Mr. Ashby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many weapons were surrendered to police during the national firearms amnesty which ran from 3 to 30 June; and if he will make a statement. [39722]

Mr. Howard: During the course of the recent amnesty, nearly 23,000 firearms, 700,000 rounds of ammunition and 3,000 other weapons were surrendered to police forces in Great Britain, I am very pleased with the response. Every one of the thousands of weapons which have been handed in no longer poses a threat to the community. The following table gives a detailed summary of the types of firearm surrendered to each force:

Summary of firearms and other weapons and ammunition surrendered to the police aduring the firearms amnesty June 1996 by police force area

Number of items surrendered — *England and Wales*

Police force area	*Rifles*	*Total firearms*				*Total other weapons*	*Total rounds of ammunition*
		Smooth-bore guns	*Hand guns*	*Other firearms*	*All firearms*		
Avon and Somerset	30	354	207	287	878	41	16,410
Bedfordshire	12	86	21	54	173	15	5,200
Cambridgeshire	21	149	47	91	308	7	8,066
Cheshire	37	137	69	133	376	19	11,969
Cleveland	5	53	27	113	198	0	4,043
Cumbria	29	144	80	112	365	13	7,243
Derbyshire	35	87	81	134	337	20	10,730
Devon and Cornwall	125	450	239	296	1,110	71	10,733
Dorset	53	193	110	165	521	55	24,321
Durham	18	108	61	118	305	2	4,774
Essex	68	361	123	241	793	223	15,994
Gloucestershire	30	110	23	147	310	4	5,200
Greater Manchester	21	86	97	216	420	5	17,981
Hampshire	71	293	0	352	716	227	27,500
Hertfordshire	13	57	37	54	161	4	5,366
Humberside	20	109	81	49	259	198	11,021
Kent	50	215	133	190	588	63	14,909
Lancashire	26	185	88	205	504	36	37,938
Leicestershire	26	149	67	162	404	43	11,490
Lincolnshire	44	266	57	99	466	6	13,909
London, City of	0	1	0	5	6	0	1,569
Merseyside	16	39	70	120	245	36	5,948
Metropolitan Police	70	206	283	497	1,056	11	34,895
Norfolk	20	289	79	217	605	5	15,155
Northamptonshire	16	86	58	62	222	5	2,411
Northumbria	44	101	109	174	428	5	16,499
North Yorkshire	26	130	68	87	311	17	9,259
Nottinghamshire	11	200	84	217	512	18	10,338
South Yorkshire	17	81	139	115	352	180	9,860
Staffordshire	24	155	71	173	423	59	20,635
Suffolk	57	324	107	162	650	79	16,468
Surrey	32	111	94	131	368	91	12,960
Sussex	73	282	208	310	873	116	35,002
Thames Valley	102	316	211	235	864	53	20,917
Warwickshire	15	80	48	69	212	5	9.666
West Mercia	29	244	85	168	526	24	14,047

Summary of firearms and other weapons and ammunition surrendered to the police aduring the firearms amnesty June 1996 by police force area

Number of items surrendered — *England and Wales*

Police force area	*Total firearms*					*Total other weapons*	*Total rounds of ammunition*
	Rifles	*Smooth-bore guns*	*Hand guns*	*Other firearms*	*All firearms*		
West Midlands	39	129	126	303	597	55	19,306
West Yorkshire	24	97	83	145	349	519	6,938
Wiltshire	55	221	61	108	445	17	15,180
Total England	1,404	6,684	3,632	6,516	18,236	2,347	541,850
Dyfed Powys	43	292	117	41	493	4	25,047
Gwent	17	40	22	31	110	1	1,366
North Wales	21	148	65	98	332	0	15,464
South Wales	20	141	74	105	340	44	7,309
Total Wales	101	621	278	275	1,275	49	49,186
Total England and Wales	1,505	7,305	3,910	6,791	19,511	2,396	591,036
Central Scotland	24	83	30	78	215	33	3,035
Dumfries and Galloway	40	144	26	75	285	32	4,983
Fife	20	126	30	131	307	98	12,900
Grampian	40	29[illegible]	76	133	547	116	13,120
Lothian and Borders	50	141	64	242	497	29	14,455
Northern	70	172	51	75	368	26	18,504
Strathclyde	78	284	195	379	936	45	30,805
Tayside	32	96	60	85	273	87	6,359
Total Scotland	354	1,344	532	1,198	3,428	466	104,161
Total Great Britain	1,859	8,649	4,442	7,989	22,939	2,862	695,197

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy in relation to recommendations made by adjudicators in dismissed or withdrawn immigration appeals. [39723]

Mr. Howard: There is no statutory power enabling an adjudicator to make a recommendation in an appeal which is dismissed or withdrawn, and I am not bound to accept such recommendations.

It has hitherto been the practice to comply with adjudicators' recommendations, unless to do so would be unreasonable or inconsistent or would undermine general policy.

I have reviewed this policy in the light of evidence that some applicants are lodging appeals which cannot succeed on their merits because of statutory limitations, but in which the appeal hearing is being used as a means of persuading an adjudicator to make a recommendation. Henceforth, I will act on adjudicators' recommendations in dismissed or withdrawn appeals only where the written determination discloses clear exceptional compassionate circumstances which have not been previously considered and which would merit the exercise of my discretion outside the immigration rules.

Doli Incapax

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received over the use of doli incapax as a defence for juveniles between the age of 10 and 14 years; and if he will make a statement. [38101]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Since 16 March 1995, when the House of Lords re-instated the common law presumption that a child between the ages of 10 and 14 is doli incapax, eight representations have been received: two letters from groups with an interest in criminal justice issues, three letters from individuals, and three letters from hon. Members on behalf of their constituents.

Metropolitan Police (Custody)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of people held, and for what period, in Metropolitan police stations in 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [38106]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that a total of 392,402 persons were held in custody in Metropolitan police stations between April 1995 and March 1996. The period of time for which each detainee was held is not recorded centrally.

Stop and Search

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were stopped and searched by the police in each district of the Metropolitan police, for each quarter, for 1994–95 and 1995–96; and if he will provide an ethnic breakdown of those stopped and searched. [38866]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were stopped and searched by the police in each police authority for each quarter, in 1994–95 and 1995–96; and if he will provide an ethnic breakdown of those stopped and searched. [38865]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The following tables give information on searches of persons or vehicles under section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and other legislation. Statistics for the

first quarter of 1996 are not yet available. For the only information which is available on the ethnic breakdown of those stopped and searched in 1994–95, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) on 29 March at columns *792–93*.

Searches of persons or vehicles under pace and other legislation[1] for financial year 1994–95

Police force area	Quarter 2 1994	Quarter 3 1994	Quarter 4 1994	Quarter 1 1995	Total
Avon and Somerset	1,324	1,357	1,637	1,746	6,064
Bedfordshire	474	435	679	415	2,003
Cambridgeshire	897	580	575	589	2,641
Cheshire	231	363	196	293	1,083
Cleveland	695	639	1,290	2,879	5,503
Cumbria	1,708	1,937	2,355	2,340	8,340
Derbyshire	1,615	1,730	2,153	2,539	8,037
Devon and Cornwall	374	396	354	247	1,371
Dorset	489	760	614	790	2,653
Durham	879	734	780	1,082	3,475
Essex	1,283	1,196	1,279	1,156	4,914
Gloucestershire	807	929	1,039	1,419	4,194
Greater Manchester	11,191	9,996	10,232	13,103	44,522
Hampshire	614	617	890	1,059	3,180
Hertfordshire	1,411	1,218	1,253	1,259	5,141
Humberside	440	358	596	788	2,182
Kent	1,143	710	828	890	3,571
Lancashire	2,358	2,095	2,306	2,561	9,320
Leicestershire	3,768	4,739	4,971	4,460	17,938
Lincolnshire	531	498	481	590	2,100
London, City of	746	775	977	1,096	3,594
Merseyside	4,029	3,544	3,750	3,522	14,845
Metropolitan Police	72,378	75,418	77,634	84,199	309,629
Norfolk	1,689	1,893	2,218	2,056	7,856
Northamptonshire	846	929	1,349	1,116	4,240
Northumbria	3,223	3,740	5,504	8,677	21,144
North Yorkshire	745	582	736	688	2,751
Nottinghamshire	519	594	591	747	2,451
South Yorkshire	1,845	1,580	2,035	1,990	7,450
Staffordshire	504	573	635	790	2,502
Suffolk	908	1,063	893	929	3,793
Surrey	4,066	3,869	4,068	3,405	15,408
Sussex	1,342	1,589	1,685	1,544	6,160
Thames Valley	1,578	1,541	1,763	2,656	7,538
Warwickshire	1,401	1,293	1,360	1,352	5,406
West Mercia	2,183	2,107	2,690	2,891	9,871
West Midlands	1,668	1,943	2,118	1,918	7,647
West Yorkshire	1,015	1,011	1,306	1,371	4,703
Wiltshire	1,215	593	489	384	2,681
Dyfed-Powys	2,761	3,846	3,031	2,959	12,597
Gwent	759	803	1,065	1,144	3,771
North Wales	3,074	3,435	3,236	2,762	12,507
South Wales	1,690	1,492	1,430	1,493	6,105
All forces	142,416	145,500	155,071	169,894	612,881

[1] But not searches of persons or vehicles under S60 or S81 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Searches of persons or vehicles under pace and other legislation[1] for financial year 1995–96 (Available quarters)

Police Force Area	Quarter 2 1995	Quarter 3 1995	Quarter 4 1995	Total
Avon	1,908	1,829	2,092	5,829
Bedfordshire	484	484	702	1,670
Cambridgeshire	824	729	630	2,183
Cheshire	448	313	437	1,198
Cleveland	3,357	2,969	3,334	9,660
Cumbria	2,422	2,231	2,618	7,271
Derbyshire	3,466	3,135	3,506	10,107
Devon and Cornwall	567	457	907	1,931
Dorest	673	639	666	1,978
Durham	1,059	706	836	2,601
Essex	1,517	1,343	1,722	4,582

Searches of persons or vehicles under pace and other legislation[1] for financial year 1995–96 (Available quarters)

Police Force Area	Quarter 2 1995	Quarter 3 1995	Quarter 4 1995	Total
Gloucestershire	1,309	1,235	1,328	3,872
Greater Manchester	12,014	11,949	12,168	36,131
Hampshire	1,987	1,694	2,314	5,995
Hertfordshire	1,355	1,286	1,466	4,107
Humberside	593	496	582	1,671
Kent	793	675	1,126	2,594
Lancashire	3,005	2,807	3,050	8,862
Leicestershire	5,005	3,693	4,418	13,166
Lincolnshire	626	950	1,506	3,082
London, City of	1,201	1,298	1,030	3,529
Merseyside	4,411	4,729	5,791	14,931
Metropolitan Police	83,890	75,075	76,208	235,173
Norfolk	1,855	1,522	2,191	5,568
Northamptonshire	1,234	1,383	1,455	4,072
Northumbria	7,856	7,965	7,787	23,608
North Yorkshire	802	909	1,119	2,830
Nottinghamshire	843	803	795	2,441
South Yorkshire	1,738	1,363	1,733	4,834
Staffordshire	1,047	1,224	1,539	3,810
Suffolk	904	1,222	1,026	3,052
Surrey	4,233	3,551	3,501	11,285
Sussex	1,721	1,761	2,070	5,552
Thames Valley	2,992	2,690	2,756	8,438
Warwickshire	1,336	1,904	2,050	5,290
West Mercia	2,685	2,977	3,471	9,133
West Midlands	3,505	3,846	4,478	11,829
West Yorkshire	1,511	1,419	2,515	5,445
Wiltshire	577	608	629	1,814
Dyfed-Powys	3,806	5,571	3,420	12,797
Gwent	1,255	1,151	1,367	3,773
North Wales	2,907	2,925	2,823	8,655
South Wales	1,241	1,167	1,570	3,978
All forces	177,012	166,583	176,732	520,327

[1] But not searches of person or vehicles under S60 or S81 of the criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Operation Eagle Eye

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost of Operation Eagle Eye. [38867]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* I understand from the commissioner that during 1995–96, £4.8 million was spent on vehicles, technology and training in support of Operation Eagle Eye which is one of the agreed priorities for the Metropolitan police.

Actual personnel costs for 1995–96 are not available but the commissioner estimates that personnel costs for Operation Eagle Eye for 1996–97 will be £17.1 million.

Closed Circuit Television (Wales)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many schools in Wales applied for funding under the closed circuit television challenge competition; and what percentage of them were successful. [38879]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* There were 40 bids from Wales which included schools either solely or as an element. Eight of these—20 per cent.—were successful.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money his Department contributed towards each of the projects in Wales which were successful in the closed circuit television competition this year; and what percentage this was of the total cost of each project. [38877]

Mr. Maclean: *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The information is contained in the table.

Home Office CCTV challenge competition 1996–97
Winners in Wales

Name of bid	*Amount awarded (£)*	*Percentage of total*	*Total capital cost of scheme*
Aberystwyth town centre and station	62,000	47.7	130,000
Bryn Hafren comprehensive school, Barry [1]	26,620	75	35,493
Glan Ely high school, Cardiff [1]	25,200	75	33,600
Llanrumney high school, Cardiff [1]	27,651	75	36,868
Cardiff high school [1]	21,546	75	28,728
Cardigan town centre	31,500	48.5	65,000
Derwendeg primary school, Caerphilly [1]	4,000	66.7	6,000
Llandudno town centre	130,500	37.3	350,000
Llangefni town centre, Anglesey	27,000	49.1	55,000
Gurnos housing estate, hospital, shops, school and two business estates, Merthyr Tydfil	217,500	61.3	355,000
Blaenbaglan primary school, Neath and Port Talbot [1]	12,072	75	16,096
Dwr-Y-Felin lower school, Neath and Port Talbot [1]	10,538	75	14,051
Penarth town centre	59,000	47.6	124,000
Swansea enterprise park	71,500	47.67	150,000
Total	726,627	51.9	1,399,836

[1] Welsh Office contirbuted funds for these schemes.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he took to inform eligible organisations in Wales of the closed circuit television challenge competition; what intermediaries were used in the information and distribution process; who received the information; what percentage of those receiving the information participated in the challenge competition; and what percentage of them were successful. [38878]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The closed circuit television challenge competition 1996–97 was officially launched at a press conference on 22 November 1995, which received wide coverage. On the same day, copies of the bidding guidance were sent to all chief executives of county councils and district councils; to all chief officers of police and clerks to police authorities; and to all chief probation officers in England and Wales. Copies were also sent to crime prevention officers in every police force area, and to everyone who submitted a bid to the previous CCTV challenge competition. Further copies were sent to anyone who requested one and we are aware that others were distributed by local copying. No complete list of recipients were kept. There were a total of 64 bids from Wales; 8.1 per cent. of the total number of bids received. Fourteen of these were successful 5.4 per cent. of all successful bids.

Street Robbery

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the arrest and conviction rates for street robbery for each quarter from 1994 to June 1996 for the Metropolitan police area. [38868]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The available information on arrests has been supplied by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and is given in the following table. Information on conviction rates for street robberies is not available.

Arrests for street robbery in the Metropolitan police district

Year	*Number of arrests*
1994	
Quarter 1	583
Quarter 2	591
Quarter 3	683
Quarter 4	753
1995	
Quarter 1	784
Quarter 2	1,214
Quarter 3	1,274
Quarter 4	1,260
1996	
Quarter 1	1,109
Quarter 2	1,138

Recidivism

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the most recently available numbers of prisoners reconvicted within *(a)* two years, *(b)* four years and *(c)* five years of discharge from each (i) adult female local prison, (ii) adult female open prison, (iii) female closed training prison and (iv) female open and closed young offender institution; [38752]

(2) if he will list the most recently available number of prisoners reconvicted within *(a)* two years, *(b)* four years and *(c)* five years of discharge from each (i) local prison, (ii) open prison, (iii) dispersal prison, (iv) category B prison and (v) young offender institution. [38745]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 23 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about reconvicted prisoners.

I attach tables in reply to points (a) of each of these Questions. Information in reply to points (b) and (c) is not available at this time. I will write to you again giving you the information in the near future.

With reference to *(a)*, the most recent available information relates to a sample of prisoners discharged from prison during 1992. The information available is as follows:

Table 1: Reconviction rates within two years of discharge in 1992 for prisoners discharged from Local prison regimes. Female establishments are asterisked. Figures in brackets give the range above and below the estimate that rates are likely to vary according to chance [1]

Establishment	*Two year percentage reconvicted*	*Number sampled*
Bedford	41 (17)	51
Belmarsh	43 (8)	325
Birmingham	54 (10)	183
Bristol	59 (13)	112
Brixton	34 (11)	149
Bullingdon/Oxford	31 13)	98
Cardiff	62 (11)	123
Chelmsford	37 (13)	65
Durham	49 (9)	199
Elmley	61 (17)	61
Exeter	47 (10)	133
Holloway*	37 (6)	289
Hull	45 (11)	112
Leeds	63 (8)	209
Leicester	53 (12)	109
Lewes	63 (12)	92
Lincoln	45 (10)	125
Liverpool	57 (7)	299
Newhall*	49 (11)	85
Norwich	41 (12)	116
Pentonville	45 (7)	414
Preston	56 (12)	106
Pucklechurch*	51 (11)	83
Shrewsbury	65 (14)	66
Swansea	57 (15)	71
Wandsworth	40 (6)	590
Winchester	54 (11)	123
Wormwood Scrubs	49 (7)	380
Total	49 (2)	5,100

[1] The range for chance variation is based on a 95 per cent. confidence interval, ie. the interval in which the true value is likely to lie for 19 out of 20 occasions. Figures are not given where there are fewer than 50 prisoners in the sample for an establishment.

Table 2: Reconviction rates within two years of discharge in 1992 for prisoners discharged from Open prison regimes. Female establishments are asterisked. Figures in brackets give the range above and below the estimate that rates are likely to vary according to chance [1]

Establishment	*Two year percentage reconvicted*	*Number sampled*
Askham Grange*	28 (7)	149
Drake Hall*	30 (5)	410
East Sutton*	32 (8)	137
Ford	20 (6)	354

Table 2: Reconviction rates within two years of discharge in 1992 for prisoners discharged from Open prison regimes. Female establishments are asterisked. Figures in brackets give the range above and below the estimate that rates are likely to vary according to chance [1]

Establishment	*Two year percentage reconvicted*	*Number sampled*
Grendon/Spring Hill	27 (11)	132
Hewell Grange	28 (13)	92
High Point	38 (18)	53
Kirkham	37 (7)	376
Leyhill	25 (9)	172
Morton Hall	41 (12)	109
North Sea Camp	31 (9)	132
Rudgate	29 (8)	188
Standford Hill	29 (8)	252
Sudbury	35 (7)	353
Total	31 (2)	2,927

[1] The range of chance variation is based on a 95 per cent. confidence interval, i.e. the interval in which the true value is likely to lie for 19 out of 20 occasions. Figures are not given where there are fewer than 50 prisoners in the sample for an establishment.

Table 3: Reconviction rates within two years of discharge in 1992 for prisoners discharged from Closed Cat B regimes. Female establishments are asterisked. Figure in brackets give the range above and below the estimate that rates are likely to vary according to chance [1]

Establishment	*Two year percentage reconvicted*	*Number sampled*
Dartmoor	56 (12)	108
Garth	60 (13)	64
Maidstone	35 (11)	62
Total	46 (5)	506

[1] The range for chance variation is based on a 95 per cent. confidence interval, i.e. the interval in which the true value is likely to lie for 19 out of 20 occasions. Figures are not given where there are fewer than 50 prisoners in the sample for an establishment.

Table 4: Reconviction rates within two years of discharge in 1992 for prisoners discharged from Closed Cat C regimes. Female establishments are asterisked. Figures in brackets give the range above and below the estimate that rates are likely to vary according to chance [1]

Establishment	*Two year percentage reconvicted*	*Number sampled*
Acklington	51 (8)	264
Aldington	34 (15)	69
Ashwell	37 (11)	158
Brockhill	42 (12)	115
Bulwood Hall*	43 (11)	80
Camp Hill	52 (8)	218
Channings Wood	43 (9)	185
Downview	23 (13)	69
Erlestoke	31 (15)	85
Everthorpe	70 (11)	71
Featherstone	40 (1)	165
Haverigg	64 (8)	186
High Point	43 (6)	394
Lancaster	56 (14)	86
Latchmere House	25 (13)	71
Lindholme	51 (7)	368
Littlehey	35 (11)	114

Table 4: Reconviction rates within two years of discharge in 1992 for prisoners discharged from Closed Cat C regimes. Female establishments are asterisked. Figures in brackets give the range above and below the estimate that rates are likely to vary according to chance [1]

Establishment	*Two year percentage reconvicted*	*Number sampled*
The Mount	29 (9)	147
Northeye	43 (12)	136
Norwich	47 (15)	76
Ranby	54 (8)	254
Risley	24 (9)	106
Rochester	43 (14)	57
Send	38 (15)	59
Shepton Mallet	48 (13)	91
Stafford	55 (6)	422
Stocken	39 (12)	115
Styal*	54 (9)	136
The Verne	36 (9)	194
Wayland	22 (11)	92
Wellingborough	39 (13)	83
Whatton	14 (6)	96
Wymott	59 (6)	442
Total	47 (2)	5,456

[1] This range for chance variation is based on a 95 per cent. confidence interval, i.e. the interval in which the true value is likely to lie for 19 out of 20 occasions. Figures are not given where there are fewer than 50 prisoners in the sample for an establishment.

Table 5: Reconviction rates within two years of discharge in 1992 for prisoners discharged from closed YOI regimes. Female establishments are asterisked. Figures in brackets give the range above and below the estimate that rates are likely to vary according to chance [1]

Establishment	*Two year percentage reconvicted*	*Number sampled*
Castington	67 (10)	82
Deerbolt	82 (4)	461
Dover	63 (7)	209
Feltham	60 (7)	227
Glen Parva	72 (5)	358
Hollesley Bay	66 (9)	127
Huntercombe/Finnamore	63 (7)	220
Moorland	81 (10)	77
Northallerton	72 (8)	138
Onley	73 (6)	298
Portland	76 (6)	225
Stoke Heath	78 (7)	170
Total	71 (2)	2,782

[1] This range for chance variation is based on a 95 per cent. confidence interval, ie. the interval in which the true value is likely to lie for 19 out of 20 occasions. Figures are not given where there are fewer than 50 prisoners in the sample for an establishment.

Table 6: Reconviction rates within two years of discharge in 1992 for prisoners discharged from Open YOI regimes. Female establishments are asterisked. Figures in brackets give the range above and below the estimate that rates are likely to vary according to change [1]

Establishment	*Two year percentage reconvicted*	*Number sampled*
Drake Hall*	50 (13)	60
Guys Marsh	74 (9)	107
Hatfield	62 (8)	148
Huntercombe/Finnamore	53 (10)	10[illegible]

Table 6: Reconviction rates within two years of discharge in 1992 for prisoners discharged from Open YOI regimes. Female establishments are asterisked. Figures in brackets give the range above and below the estimate that rates are likely to vary according to change [1]

Establishment	*Two year percentage reconvicted*	*Number sampled*
Thorn Cross	67 (7)	187
Usk/Prescoed	67 (11)	70
Total	64 (4)	727

[1] This range for chance variation is based on a 95 per cent. confidence interval, i.e. the interval in which the true value is likely to lie for 19 out of 20 occasions. Figures are not given where there are fewer than 50 prisoners in the sample for an establishment.

Table 7: Reconviction rates within two years of discharge in 1992 for prisoners discharged from short sentence YOI regimes. Female establishments are asterisked. Figures in brackets give the range above and below the estimate that rates are likely to vary accordingly to chance. [1]

Establishment	*Two year percentage reconvicted*	*Number sampled*
Eastwood Park	76 (6)	211
Hollesley Bay	66 (8)	163
Werrington	66 (11)	78
Wetherby	72 (5)	340
Total	72 (3)	792

[1] This range for change variation is based on a 95 per cent. confidence interval, i.e. the interval in which the true value is likely to lie for 19 out of 20 occasions. Figures are not given where there are fewer than 50 prisoners in the sample for an establishment.

Table 8: Reconviction rates within two years of discharge in 1992 for prisoners discharged from Juvenile YOI regimes. Female establishments are asterisked. Figures in brackets give the range above and below the estimate that rates are likely to vary according to chance [1]

Establishment	*Two year percentage reconvicted*	*Number sampled*
Feltham	82 (5)	186
Kirklevington	96 (4)	118
Onley	89 (4)	271
Werrington	90 (4)	261
Total	89 (2)	836

[1] This range for chance variation is based on a 95 per cent. confidence interval, i.e. the interval in which the true value is likely to lie for 19 out of 20 occasions. Figures are not given where there are fewer than 50 prisoners in the sample for an establishment.

Victim Support Groups

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the victim support groups in Wales that his Department supports financially; what level of support was given in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and what is the estimated support for each group in 1996–97; [38640]

(2) how many victim support groups in Wales have paid members on their staff; [38641]

(3) what percentage increase there has been on the number of victims referred to each victim support group in Wales; and what was the percentage increase compared with the increase in funding for these groups during the last three years. [38642]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The Home Office local funding grant is channelled though the Victim Support national office and is allocated to local schemes and branches by the local funding panel, a sub-committee of the national council. Applications from local schemes are considered in accordance with criteria agreed with the Home Office, but the allocation of funds to particular schemes and the priorities which guide that funding are matters for Victim Support, not the Home Office.

The table summarises the available information. It is based on data supplied by Victim Support. Some reorganisation of schemes have occurred in the period, and not all schemes have received Home Office grant throughout it.

In 1995–96, 19 victim support schemes in Wales had paid members on their staff.

Victim support schemes in Wales

	1993–94		*1994–95*			*1995–96*				*1996–97*
Scheme	*Grant*	*Referrals*	*Grant*	*Percentage increase*	*Referrals*	*Percentage increase*	*Grant*	*Percentage increase*	*Referrals*	*Percentage increase*	*Estimated grant*
North Wales	32,430	573	32,754	1.0	4,526	689.9	40,634	24.1	—	—	27,509
Dyfed and Powys											
Cardigan and Carmarthen	16,906	2,669	—	—	2,520	-5.6	17,246	—	1,868	-25.9	17,677
Llanelli/Ammanford	27,335	—	27,581	0.9	2,770	—	27,857	1.0	2,250	-18.8	27,857
Pembrokeshire	16,221	2,338	16,356	0.8	2,153	-7.9	16,520	1.0	1,776	-17.5	16,520
Brecon	16,906	1,459	—	—	1,332	-8.7	17,246	—	1,158	-13.1	17,677
Montgomeryshire	16,906	1,800	17,075	1.0	1,584	-12.0	17,246	1.0	1,379	-12.9	17,677
Radnorshire	15,378	1,070	17,054	10.9	936	-12.5	17,246	1.1	708	-24.4	17,677
Ystradgynlais	16,906	899	17,075	1.0	802	-10.8	17,246	1.0	577	-15.6	17,677
Gwent	61,717	—	62,334	1.0	—	—	62,958	1.0	—	—	64,532
South Wales											
Bridgend	24,420	2,822	24,638	0.9	4,502	59.5	31,364	27.3	4,537	0.8	32,148
Caerphilly and District	22,531	1,646	22,705	0.8	197	-88.0	22,932	1.0	1,173	495.4	23,505
Cynon Valley	7,872	1,653	15,880	101.7	2,732	65.3	16,039	1.0	2,294	-16.0	16,440
Merthyr Tydfil	22,602	2,285	22,802	0.9	792	-65.3	23,007	0.9	2,825	256.7	23,582
Rhondda	—	1,305	—	—	726	-44.4	—	—	1,708	135.3	—
Taff Ely	26,336	2,717	26,472	0.5	1,001	-63.2	26,736	1.0	2,041	103.9	30,644
Upper Rhymney Valley	14,008	2,218	14,148	1.0	150	-93.2	14,238	0.6	1,335	790.0	14,594
Barry and Vale of Glamorgan	20,904	2,068	22,815	9.1	531	-74.3	23,225	1.8	2,745	416.9	23,806
Cardiff Greater	—	1,090	4,000	—	485	-55.5	4,000	0.0	1,396	187.8	—
Central Cardiff	4,000	1,422	4,000	0.0	542	-61.9	4,000	0.0	1,050	93.7	4,000
South Glamorgan	4,000	283	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Neath and District	23,488	4,602	21,016	-10.5	291	-93.7	21,226	1.0	1,082	271.8	26,240
Port Talbot	16,906	4,804	17,075	1.0	302	-93.7	17,246	1.0	1,413	367.8	17,677
Swansea and Lliw Valley	32,210	1,668	32,838	1.9	1,311	-21.4	33,034	0.6	2,627	100.4	33,860

Tobacco Smuggling

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what increase there has been in recorded tobacco smuggling-related crime since the inception of the single market. [38818]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

Detections by the excise verification officers employed by Custom to combat smuggling of excise goods within the European Union for the first three years of the single market are shown in the table.

Calender year	*Number of detections*	*Total revenue involved (£ million)*
1993	813	1.2
1994	2,059	3.6
1995	3,429	6.9

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Foreign Aid

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* tenurial, *(b)* land ownership, *(c)* land use and *(d)* land management conditions he has attached to foreign aid packages since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [38192]

Mr. Hanley: Where issues of rights and occupancy access to land are important, these are one of several key criteria we take into account when planning and implementing aid projects in both rural and urban areas. The conditions that ODA attaches to such projects vary depending on the nature of the project and the needs of the recipient country.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much financial assistance has been given to foreign aid projects to assist

with *(a)* alterations to rural land use, *(b)* alterations to rural land ownership patterns and *(c)* land management projects since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [38190]

Mr. Hanley: ODA does not maintain data covering expenditure on land issues in the form requested. It would therefore not be possible to provide a detailed answer without disproportionate cost. However, in the years 1989–90 to 1994–95, ODA support in the general area of land development/reclamation amounted to over £20 million; over £43 million was spent on rural development in the same period. A wide range of developing countries have benefited from such assistance, particularly the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia.

Yemen (Disaster Relief)

Sir Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the projects assisted, indicating the financial amounts involved, in respect of United Kingdom disaster relief for Yemen following the recent severe flooding; and if he will make a statement. [38473]

Mr. Hanley: The UK responded swiftly and generously to the plight of flood affected populations following the severe flooding in Yemen last month. The UK's response has been as follows:

Response	*Channel*	*Value* £
Relief flight with consignment of tents and plastic sheeting.	British Red Cross Society	202,076
Consignment of drugs.	British Red Cross Society	1,271
Provision of technical expert for disaster assessment and coordination.	UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs	50,000
Recruitment of planning specialists, and monitoring and supervision of field operations.		
Assistance to the Health Sector Emergency well rehabilitation Water tankering operations	Merlin Care Oxfam	100,000 70,000 70,000
Total		493,347

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Law of the Sea Convention

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer from the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy of 15 July, *Official Report*, columns *360–61*, if he will set out the considerations as a result of which the United Kingdom has not yet ratified the UN law of the sea convention of 1982; and when the United Kingdom ratification is expected to take place. [38862]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: It is the Government's intention that the United Kingdom will accede to the United Nations convention on the law of the sea in due course. In the light of a number of continuing uncertainties in the international situation with regard to fisheries issues, the Government have concluded that now is not an appropriate time to accede to the convention. The timing of accession remains under review and Parliament will be informed as soon as the Government have taken a decision.

Bosnia (War Crimes)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions the United Kingdom has taken to secure international funding to support the work of the war crimes tribunal in Bosnia. [38117]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia is funded by assessed and voluntary contributions.

We encourage all member states to pay their assessed contributions promptly and in full as we do. We have also made voluntary contributions of almost £600,000 to the office of the prosecutor and hope that others follow our example.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role the implementation force—IFOR—troops have in seeking out war crimes suspects. [38118]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: IFOR troops will detain and transfer to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia any persons indicted by the tribunal whom they encounter in the performance of their duties if circumstances permit.

Sudan

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the Government's policy in respect of the political charter concluded in April 1996 between the Government of Sudan and the southern Sudanese factions. [39026]

Mr. Hanley: The charter contains positive elements. However, the largest southern Sudanese faction, the Sudan People's Liberation Army—SPLA—is not a party to it. It is not yet clear if the charter is a serious peace initiative.

We urge all parties to pursue peace through negotiation. It is time for the Sudanese Government and the SPLA each to test the professed readiness of the other for peace. A monitored ceasefire, allowing unconditional delivery of humanitarian aid, would be an excellent start.

Banana-producing Countries

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representation he has received about and what assessment he has made of the effects of the exclusion of the Caribbean banana-producing states from the disputes panel at the World Trade Organisation. [38995]

Mr. David Davis: The European Commission, strongly encouraged by the UK, pressed for full African Caribbean and Pacific participation in the World Trade Organisation panel set up to examine complaints about the EU banana regime. However, the panel ruled on 13 June after the ACP states would be able to attend its first substantive meeting and present their case there. The Government have not yet received any direct representations from

Caribbean Governments about this. However, the UK will continue to encourage the Commission to ensure that Caribbean interests are adequately defended.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the time allocated to the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of states to prepare their case for presentation at the World Trade Organisation; and if he will make a statement. [38996]

Mr. Davis: The dispute settlement panel of the World Trade Organisation, established to examine complaints against the EU banana regime, ruled on 13 June that the ACP group of states would have to present their arguments in the WTO banana dispute on 13 August. Panel proceedings in the WTO are required to be completed within set time scales, and the time allocation in this case is no different from other cases. The Government will continue to support the European Commission in defending the interests of the ACP robustly in the WTO.

Military Training Assistance Scheme

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy, when considering the consolidation of the assessment and monitoring procedures of the United Kingdom military training assistance scheme, to include selection methods, regulation of training methods, content of the training programme and procedures for follow up assessment. [38624]

Mr. David Davis: Selection methods and follow up assessments are regularly monitored to ensure that this Department's UKMTAS programme for overseas countries is achieving value for money and overall objectives. Training course content and methodology are the responsibility of the various UK training establishments, which operate to high professional standards.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to replace the present method of assessment of the United Kingdom military training assistance scheme in Guatemala with an assessment and monitoring procedure which is wholly independent. [38623]

Mr. Davis: The scheme is already constantly monitored to ensure that value for money and overall foreign policy objectives are being achieved.

MEPs (Allowances)

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what United Kingdom taxes the general expenditure allowance and the secretarial assistance allowance paid to United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament are subject. [38963]

Mr. David Davis: The allowances of Members of the European Parliament are not subject to UK taxes.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the rules governing the payment of the international travel allowance to United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament for non-official meetings. [39865]

Mr. Davis: To claim the travel allowance, Members of the European Parliament must make a declaration that the journey was made in pursuit of their duties and provide supporting documentation in the form of an invitation or programme of the visit. The European Parliament guidelines require Members to produce tickets and receipts in order to obtain a refund of costs.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current level, in pounds sterling, of the allowance paid to United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament for international travel not connected with official meetings. [38964]

Mr. Davis: A travel allowance of up to 3000 ecu or £2,480 per year is available to MEPs to meet the costs of travel in performance of their duties, for purposes other than official meetings.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current level, in pounds sterling, of *(a)* the general expenditure allowance and *(b)* the secretarial assistance allowance paid to United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament. [38962]

Mr. Davis: The general expenditure allowance is currently, 3,099 ecu or £2,562 per month.

The secretarial assistance allowance is £8,937 ecu or £7,389 per month.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the administration procedure by which United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament claim payment of *(a)* the general expenditure allowance and *(b)* the secretarial assistance allowance. [38966]

Mr. Davis: Both allowances are claimed by filling out the appropriate application form available in the European Parliament. The general expenditure allowance is paid as a lump sum and without need to produce justification. The secretarial assistance allowance is only paid on declaration of a contact between a Member of the European Parliament and an assistant. The allowance is paid directly to the assistant.

European Youth Foundation

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons Her Majesty's Government withdrew funding from the European Youth Foundation under the cultural convention at the Council of Europe; and if he will make a statement. [38956]

Mr. David Davis: The decision to cease our annual endowment to the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe with effect from 1 January 1997 was made in the context of our determination to take the steps necessary to reduce public expenditure and consequently, the burden on the taxpayer. Participation in the EYF is voluntary. Set against this backdrop, it was not possible to exempt the EYF from this process of financial constraint. We do, however, continue to support young people and European youth activities through our contribution to the general budget of the Council of Europe.

Overseas Missions (Asylum Requests)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the procedure followed by British missions overseas when foreign nationals of the mission's host country request asylum at the mission. [39033]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 22 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *40*.

Security and Intelligence Services (Industrial Tribunals)

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of state for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of the Government towards access by staff of the security and intelligence services to industrial tribunals. [39610]

Mr. Rifkind: For reasons of national security, staff of the security and intelligence services have been subject to a general ban preventing their access to industrial tribunals. Following advice from the heads of the services, the Home Secretary and I have agreed that there should no longer be a general ban, but that decisions on whether access to industrial tribunals can be allowed should be taken case by case. Staff will be allowed access to an industrial tribunal in those cases where national security considerations can be met by the procedural safeguards available; where they cannot, access will continue to be disallowed.

This change carries forward the Government's policy of protecting national security, while also protecting to the maximum extent possible the employment rights of the staff of the security and intelligence services on whose diligence, professionalism and commitment the nation depends. It does not affect the restrictions on union membership by staff of the services.

Gibraltar

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to increase the use of Gibraltar airport. [38488]

Mr. David Davis *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* We would welcome arrangements for the increased use of Gibraltar airport which would benefit Gibraltar and accord with Gibraltar's wishes.

Entry Clearance Referrals

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to lay before the House the 1995 report by Dame Elizabeth Anson, the independent monitor, of refusal of entry clearance where there is no right of appeal. [39611]

Mr. Rifkind: I have arranged for copies of Dame Elizabeth's 1995 report to be placed in the Libraries of the House today. I welcome the report and note Dame Elizabeth's recommendations, which will receive careful consideration.

Wassenaar Arrangement

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the negotiations to establish the Wassenaar arrangement. [39609]

Mr. David Davis: After more than two years of negotiations the Wassenaar arrangement was formally launched at a meeting of the 33 founding participating states on 11 and 12 July 1996 in Vienna.

The purpose of the arrangement is to contribute to regional and international security and stability, by promoting transparency and greater responsibility in transfers of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies, thus preventing destabilising accumulations. Participating states will seek, through their national policies, to ensure that transfers of these items do not contribute to the development or enhancement of military capabilities which undermine these goals, and are not diverted to support such capabilities.

The arrangement will complement and reinforce existing control regimes for weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, by focusing on the threats to international and regional peace and security which may arise from transfers of conventional armaments and sensitive dual-use goods and technologies where the risks are judged greatest.

As part of the arrangement, participating states have agreed new control lists for military and dual-use goods and technologies. These are more focused than earlier lists on those goods and technologies which pose the greatest risk to international and regional peace and security. They are also shorter, thus benefiting British industry. A target date of 1 November 1996 has been set for the implementation of these new control lists.

Participating states will exchange, on a voluntary basis, information that will enhance transparency, will lead to discussions among all participating states on arms transfers, as well as on sensitive dual-use goods and technologies.

The Wassenaar arrangement is based on political, not legal commitment. All measures taken will be in accordance with national legislation and policies and implemented at national discretion.

The arrangement will not be directed against any state or group of states and will not impede bona fide civil transactions. Nor will it interfere with the rights of states to acquire legitimate means with which to defend themselves, as recognised in article 51 of the charter of the United Nations.

The Government welcome the establishment of the Wassenaar arrangement as a further step towards increased regional and international security. The UK will continue to play a full and active role in developing the arrangement further and in line with British interests.

A copy of the "Initial Elements", which describe the operating procedures of the Wassenaar arrangement, has been placed in the Library of both Houses.

PRIME MINISTER

Sheffield City Council

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 16 April, *Official Report*, column 509, and the letter of 17 April regarding remarks about Sheffield city council, when the hon. Member can expect a full reply. [37119]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member on 16 April, *Official Report*, column 509.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 July. [37412]

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 July. [37414]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Intelligence and Security Committee

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if hon. Members may appear before the Intelligence and Security Committee. [38967]

The Prime Minister: Yes. It is for the committee to decide whom it invites to give evidence.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister what is the total amount spent so far arising from the Intelligence and Security Committee being established. [38841]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Direct administrative and staff costs—excluding accommodation—were £207,054 from December 1994 to the end of June 1996.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister how many officials work for the Intelligence and Security Committee; and what are their grades. [38842]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Four. One grade 7, one senior executive officer, one higher executive officer (development) and a personal secretary.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

General Practice Professorships

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many general medical practitioners hold chairs of general practice or primary care in United Kingdom universities and medical schools. [38393]

Mr. Forth: The information requested is not available centrally. I understand that there are 23 professors of general practice in post at universities in the UK.

Sex Industry (Advertisements)

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will make it her policy to ban job advertisements associated with the sex industry from appearing in jobcentres; [38859]

(2) what steps she intends to take to remove sex industry advertisements from publications available in jobcentres. [38860]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. David Hanson, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions asking if she will make it her policy to ban job advertisements associated with the sex industry appearing in Jobcentres and what steps she intends to take to remove sex industry advertisements from publications available in Jobcentres. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The Employment Service (ES) has a responsibility under the Employment and Training Act 1973 to provide a public employment service to both employers and job seekers. We must therefore have strong reasons for refusing any employer access to our services.

Jobcentres have written guidance which stipulates that they must not accept vacancies which: are illegal; would result in a breach of the law; might put job seekers at risk. It is not our intention to ban vacancies for an entire industry which would necessarily involve a very wide range of jobs. However, we acknowledge that there are certain types of vacancies that it would not be in the best interests of a public employment service to advertise, and our guidance explains this. The guidance also asks Jobcentres to take special care when handling certain types of vacancies, for example, those that offer employment in sauna baths or massage parlours.

Any complaints Jobcentres receive from job applicants are followed up and where there is evidence that an employer is not genuine, or the vacancy falls into one of the categories described above, the service to that employer may be discontinued.

The ES aims to provide job seekers with the widest possible access to job vacancies. Jobcentre managers can therefore decide to make available jobs newspapers for publications produced outside the Department, providing they are relevant to the employment, training or educational needs of job seekers. We have to consider the needs of the majority of our job seekers looking for work and not deny them access to vacancies because a publication contains an occasional vacancy which some people may dislike.

It is not the role of the ES to censor private publications. There are governing bodies specifically for this. Advertisements appearing in newspapers and other publications must comply with the appropriate Codes of Practice, and any individuals having a complaint can ask the Advertising Standards Authority to investigate.

I hope this is helpful.

"Jobsearch"

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many jobcentres and job clubs currently subscribe to "Jobsearch"; [38916]

(2) what assessment she has made of the quality of advertisements in the magazine "Jobsearch". [38915]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. David Hanson, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions asking what assessment she has made of the quality of advertisements in the magazine Jobsearch, and how many Jobcentres and Jobclubs currently subscribe to Jobsearch. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

It is not the role of the Employment Service to monitor or attempt to influence the quality or content of privately produced publications. There are governing bodies specifically for this. Advertisements in newspapers or other publications must comply with the appropriate Codes of Practice, and any individual having a complaint can ask the Advertising Standards Authority to investigate.

There are no central subscription arrangements for the Jobsearch magazine, nor do we keep centrally records of Jobcentres or Jobclubs which subscribe. To obtain this information would require disproportionate costs so I am sorry I am unable to provide it.

Access to Work Scheme

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will monitor the impact of the introduction of employer contributions under the access to work scheme; and when she plans to make a statement on the impact. [37638]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Alfred Morris, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about monitoring the new cost sharing arrangements in the Access to Work programme. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Access to Work is operated by the Employment Service. The budget is cash limited and the new arrangements introducing cost sharing from 1 June enable us to strike an appropriate balance between helping to meet the needs of people with disabilities and in making best use of available resources. We shall be monitoring the new arrangements and expenditure closely, including numbers separately identified of people unemployed, employed, and self employed on application for Access to Work support.

I hope this is helpful.

School Buildings

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will make a statement on the work commissioned by the Funding Agency for Schools from the firm of surveyors, Hunters; [38275]

(2) what reports the Funding Agency for Schools has commissioned on the condition of grant-maintained school buildings. [38276]

(3) what information she collates on the condition of grant-maintained school buildings individually and in aggregate, with special reference to the cost of the backlog of repairs and maintenance; and if she will place such information in the Library. [38277]

Mrs. Gillan: This is a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to write to the hon. Member with this information.

Schools (Parental Choice)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many parents secured the primary or secondary school of their first choice for their child in the most recent year for which figures are available *(a)* in total and *(b)* for each local education authority. [38583]

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not collected centrally. However, the most recent evidence—from surveys commissioned by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities in 1992 and *The Times* in 1993—suggested that some 90 per cent. of parents gained a place at their first choice school.

Licences

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the licences issued by her Department; for what purpose they are issued; and what are the administrative costs for each. [38685]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department issues copyright licences under delegated authority from Her Majesty's Stationery Office. No separate record is kept of cost, but it is negligible and substantially less than the cost of one administrative level staff unit.

Teachers (North Yorkshire)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the full-time equivalent number of teachers employed in North Yorkshire *(a)* infant and primary and *(b)* secondary schools in each year since 1974. [38929]

Mr. Robin Squire: The available information is shown in the following table:

Full-time equivalent of qualified teachers in maintained primary and secondary schools in North Yorkshire Local Education Authority area: 1975–1995

Position in January each year

	Primary	*Secondary*
1975	2,661	2,805
1976	2,718	2,945
1977	2,744	3,059
1978	2,727	3,126
1979	2,698	3,160
1980	2,648	3,219
1981	2,529	3,197
1982	2,402	3,178
1983	2,304	3,205
1984	2,282	3,197
1985	2,271	3,073
1986	2,274	3,017
1987	2,322	2,938
1988	2,356	2,852
1989	2,411	2,814
1990	2,450	2,795
1991	2,435	2,800
1992	2,470	2,805
1993	2,500	2,851
1994	2,503	2,758
1995	2,600	2,822

School Security

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she is co-ordinating to improve the security of schools in England and Wales. [38951]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Government have accepted in full the recommendations of the working group on school security, including for the provision of substantial additional funding earmarked specifically for school security. We have already strengthened police powers regarding the carrying of knives and other weapons on school premises. The security of schools in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total public expenditure for the training of outside consultants in the structure and language of national vocational qualifications prior to the publication of the Beaumont report; and what expenditure is planned in this regard for *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98. [39038]

Mr. Paice: The Department did not provide any training at public expense specifically on structure and language of NVQs prior to the Beaumont report. Following the receipt of that report and as stated in the Government's action plan a programme of professional development for people involved in the development of occupational standards and NVQs is planned for 1996–97, and will continue to be available until the end of the "review of all" in April 1998. A total training budget of approximately £60,000 is proposed for 1996–97. No specific amount has been set aside for consultants as opposed to others provided by industry bodies.

We expect to spend a similar amount in 1997–98.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the level of current expenditure on *(a)* additional national vocational qualifications and *(b)* the revision of existing national vocational qualifications; and what expenditure is planned for 1997–98. [39037]

Mr. Paice: The current planned level of expenditure through the standards programme for work on additional standards and national vocational qualifications is £2.2 million for 1996–97.

The current planned level of expenditure through the standards programme for work on revision and updating of standards and national vocational qualifications is £4.8 million for 1996–97.

Decisions on expenditure on these items for 1997–98 have not yet been taken.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the total public expenditure on the development of standards for national vocational qualifications since the inception of the standards programme; and now much of this expenditure has been on outside consultants. [39039]

Mr. Paice: Total expenditure since the inception of the standards programme for national vocational qualifications in 1988 has been £83 million. It is not possible to say how much of this has involved consultants.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which courses are now no longer approved for output funding by her Department as a result of their removal from the NVQ national database; and for each course, what was the number of students taking the course in the last three years. [38257]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Three hundred and fifty-five vocational qualifications were removed from approval and closed to new entrants to training programmes between May 1993 and May 1996. Of these, 81 are no longer eligible for output payments to TECs; they are listed. Student numbers taking each qualification are not available as trainee data are collected on an aggregated basis by level of qualification for all approved types. Data are not collected by reference to individual qualification titles.

Qualification titles:—Accommodation Services; Adult Trainers Award; Agricultural Machinery Partsmen (Special Examination); Agriculture Phase II; Aeronautical Engineering Competencies Part II; Animal Care (Small Animals) Phase 1; Animal Care (Small Animals) Phase 2; Animal Care (Special Examination); Automotive Glazing (GTL); Automotive Glazing (RTITB); Baking; Basic Quarrying (Special Examination); Basic Upholstery Skills; Beauty Therapy; Beauty Specialist's Diploma; Caring for Children (0–7 years); Certificate in Achievement in Forecourt Operations; Certificate in Cleaning Science; Certificate of Proficiency (Chemical Industry); Certificate of Tour Operating Practice Level I; Clothing and Knitting Craft Stage I; Community Care Practice; Cosmetic Make-up; Diploma in Health Community Care and Parentcraft; Diploma in Hotel Reception and Front Office Practice; Electronic Office Systems Maintenance; Electronic Office Systems Maintenance (Field); Electronic Office Systems Maintenance (Workshop) Family and Community Care; First Certificate in Caring; First Certificate in Leisure Studies; First Certificate in Science; First Diploma in Caring; First Diploma in Leisure Studies; Footware Manufacture Operatives Stage 1; Footware Manufacture Operatives Stage 2; Furniture Removing—Manual Operations; Furniture Removing—Sales Administration; Guide Dogs (Kennel Staff); Guide Dogs (Trainer); Horse Care (Level 1); Horse Care (Level 2); Industrial Ceramics (Special Examinations); Industrial Cleaning and Maintenance; Iron and Steel Production (Foundation); Kennel Craft (Special Examination); Leather Goods Manufacture; Light Leather Goods Skills Tests; Maintenance and Repair of Construction Plant Part I; Manicure; Meat Industry General Assistant; National Small Animal Care Certificate; Plumbing Craft (New Scheme); Practical Caring Skills Part II; Practical Environmental Skills; Preliminary Certificate in Applications Programming; Preliminary Examination for Banking Certificate; Preliminary Examination for membership of AAT; Process Operations (Man-Made Fibres and Film) Level 1; Process Operations (Man-Made Fibres and Film) Level 2; Recreation and Leisure Industries Part I; Recreation and Leisure Industries Part II; Road Haulage; Roadwork Craft; Saddlery Level I Skills Tests; Security and Emergency Alarm Systems Part I; Security and Emergency Alarm Systems Part II; Shoe Repair Stage I; Shoe Repair Stage II; Skillbuild (Level 1); Stock Administration and Handling Part II; Surveying for Draughtproofing; The Certificate in Accounting; The Certificate in Business Travel; Threshold Certificate; Tobacco Processing (Cigarette Making); Tobacco Processing (Cigarette Packing); Tobacco Processing (Cigarette Packing); Tobacco Processing (filter Rod Making); Tobacco Processing (Loose Tobacco); Vehicle Mechanics and Systems (Stage Two) National Craft Certificate; Waterman's Certificate (Special Examination) Part I.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which TECs have been visited in the past six months by officials from the European Commission Court of Auditors; and for what reasons the visits have been made. [39064]

Mr. Forth: Shropshire TEC was visited by officials from the European Commission Court of Auditors within the last six months. The visit was made to audit two European social fund project final claims relating to activity undertaken in 1995.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Oman (University Construction)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what checks were carried out by Her Majesty's Government before the issue of export credits in relation to the construction of a university in Oman; if such checks included inspection of the physical plans for that university; which aspects of the project relating to the construction of a university in Oman were deemed to be for non-educational purposes; and what those purposes were. [36612]

Mr. Nelson: ECGD supported a financing facility for the Sultan Qaboos university project and a subsequent, related credit facility for a teaching hospital which is part of the university complex. In accordance with normal insurance practice, ECGD relies upon information given in applications for cover. Although, ECGD saw extracts of the contract it did not see physical plans for the construction of the university. Neither ECGD nor the DTI had or has any knowledge or evidence that the university has been used for non-educational purposes.

Insolvency (Reviewer of Complaints)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list by location the reviewers of complaints appointed by each of the supervisory bodies, sponsored by his Department, indicating who is responsible for *(a)* appointing, *(b)* dismissing and *(c)* retiring them and on what basis; and what remuneration each receives. [37335]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested by the hon. Gentleman relating to four of the recognised supervisory bodies for auditors—the Institutes of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, Scotland, Ireland and the Chartered Association of Certified Accountants—is the same as that set out in my reply to his question about the recognised professional bodies for insolvency practitioners, 16 July, *Official Report*, columns *458–59*. Complaints about members of the fifth recognised supervisory body, the Association of Authorised Public accountants, are dealt with through the complaints procedures of the Chartered Association of Certified Accountants.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) pursuant to his answer of 28 March, *Official Report*, column *733*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested; [37530]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 22 March, *Official Report*, column, *366*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested. [37531]

Mr. Lang: The examination of more than 26,000 files dating back to 1987.

Audit Inspections

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will appoint DTI inspectors to investigate auditing aspects of *(a)* the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, *(b)* Polly Peck, *(c)* Barings, *(d)* Sumitomo, *(e)* Levitt and *(f)* Ferranti. [37835]

Mr. Oppenheim: No. My Department's powers of investigation extend to companies under the Companies Act 1985, but not to partnerships. The role of auditors in BCCI, Polly Peck, Barings and Ferranti are already the subject of investigations by the professions' joint disciplinary scheme. Initial investigations into Sumitomo are in the hands of the Serious Fraud Office and any auditing aspects arising out of the SFO investigation which fall short of criminality will be referred to the relevant recognised supervisory body for it to consider and take regulatory or disciplinary action as appropriate. The SFO has previously investigated and prosecuted in the case of Roger Levitt.

Small Limited Companies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many small limited companies failed to file their annual accounts and statutory returns within the statutory prescribed periods, broken down by size of company in the last available year. [37823]

Mr. Oppenheim: The precise information requested is not available.

However, in 1995–96, 23,954 companies which filed accounts late claimed small company exemptions from the full disclosure requirements of the Companies Act. This compares with a total number of small company accounts registered of 337,000. It is not possible to say how many of those companies which failed to file accounts at all within the period might have proved eligible for the small company exemption. Information on the filing of annual returns by those same companies could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Sealskin Order

Mr. Morley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to revoke the Trade Descriptions (Sealskin Goods) Information Order 1980; and if he will make a statement. [39181]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Following two rounds of public consultation, my Department published notice, on 21 June 1996—28 June 1996 in Northern Ireland—of my intention to revoke the order. This has provided a further opportunity for representations to be made. I shall be considering very carefully all the additional responses I receive before making my final decision.

Footwear Industry

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the United Kingdom share of exports of footwear by the EU in 1972, 1979 and the latest available date; and if he will provide corresponding figures for Italy, France and Germany. [38156]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested is given in the table:

Percentage shares of EU [1] exports of footwear [2] 1972, 1979 and 1994

	1972	EU9 1979	EU12 1994
UK	n/a	4.7	4.9
France	n/a	10.4	6.9
Germany[3]	n/a	7.9	9.0
Italy	n/a	71.8	48.4

Notes:

[1] Shares of EU9 in 1979 and EU12 in 1994. Data for Greece, Spain and Portugal are not available for 1979.

[2] Code 64 of the Harmonised commodity coding system.

[3] West Germany in 1979.

Source:

Eurostat Intra and Extra EU Trade.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the United Kingdom share of exports of footwear by the main manufacturing countries in 1972, 1979 and the latest available date; and if he will provide corresponding figures for Italy, France and Germany. [38157]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested is given in the table:

Percentage shares of main manufacturing countries [1] Exports of footwear [2] 1972, 1979 and 1994

	1972	1979	1994
UK	n/a	4.5	5.9
France	n/a	9.9	8.5
Germany[3]	n/a	6.7	11.0
Italy	n/a	69.9	59.1

Notes:

[1] Main manufacturing countries comprise UK, Belgium-Luxembourg, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Canada, USA and Japan.

[2] Standard international trade classification (SITC) 85.

[3] West Germany in 1979.

Source:

Eurostat Intra and Extra EU Trade.

United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the United Kingdom share of EU imports and exports of footwear in 1972, 1979 and at the latest available date. [38170]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested is given in the table.

UK percentage share of EU(1) exports and imports of footwear (1972, 1979 and 1994)

	1972	EU9 1979	EU12 1994
EU Exports	n/a	4.7	4.9
EU Imports	n/a	15.5	15.4

Notes:

[1] Shares of EU9 in 1979 and EU12 in 1994. Data for Greece, Spain and Portugal are not available for 1979.

[2] Code 64 of the Harmonised Commodity Coding System.

Source:

Eurostat Intra and Extra EU Trade.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the level of import penetration in footwear from *(a)* the rest of the world and *(b)* the EEC in 1972, 1979 and the latest available date; and if he will provide corresponding figures for Italy, France and Germany. [38164]

Mr. Oppenheim: United Kingdom import penetration for footwear for 1994, the latest year data are available, can be readily calculated from information published in "UK Markets AR 16" published by Taylor Nelson and available in the Library of the House. Comparable information for 1972 and 1979 is not available. Corresponding figures for Italy, France and Germany are not available.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many staff are assumed in his Department's budget, employed (i) full-time and (ii) part-time, *(a)* to work on press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39475]

(2) how many staff were employed full-time or part-time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94. [39429]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The numbers of staff employed in the press office and publicity branch of the Department's information directorate are as follows:

	Publicity		Press Office	
	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time
1996–97[1]	35	1	31	—
1995–96[1]	33	1	31	—
1994–95	30	2	31	—
1993–94	39	2	34	—

[1] Figures include posts arising from the 1995 Machinery of Government changes.

China (Tableware Imports)

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set out the timetable for further European Council of Ministers' decision-making in respect of quotas of tableware imports from China; and if he will make a statement. [38811]

Mr. Oppenheim: The European Commission is due to complete its annual review of these quotas, and to propose any appropriate adjustments, before 31 December 1996. The Council of Ministers will then consider the issue.

Companies (Payments)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 4 July, *Official Report*, column *496*, what was the cost of mailing the consultative document. [38907]

Mr. Page: The consultative document was mailed to all those consultees on my Department's company law mailing list at a cost of £541, including VAT.

Off-shore Oil

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action has been taken to ensure that orders for floating production units to be used in the development of United Kingdom off-shore oil reserves will either be built in the United Kingdom or have substantial United Kingdom content. [38116]

Mr. Page: My Department established a working group in 1994 to consider how to make United Kingdom industry more competitive in the supply of floating production systems. At the beginning of 1995, the group proposed a set of recommendations for Government and industry. These have been implemented and the competitiveness of UK industry has improved markedly, as evidenced by the several orders placed with UK companies for floating production system work during 1995 and 1996. Most notably, Harland and Wolff in Belfast are building what is expected to be the world's largest shipshaped floating production system for BP. Also, BARMAC, AMEC, SLP, Heerema Hartlepool and Brown Brothers have all won orders and UK industry is well positioned for further work.

Civil Space

Mr. Batiste: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the progress of the review of Government policy towards civil space. [39617]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I hosted the second United Kingdom space policy forum at Queen Mary and Westfield college on Tuesday 25 June. This was a great success with almost 200 senior members of the UK space community attending. As a result of the forum and the wide-ranging discussions during the review, I am now publishing a "Forward Plan for UK Space Activities", copies of which are being placed in the Library of the House. The plan will be presented to the press tomorrow and will set out key goals for the UK civil space programme.

Companies House

Mr. Batiste: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the results of the Companies House contracting-out programme. [39618]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Companies House contracting out programme announced by the then President of the Board of Trade in December 1994 has now been completed.

The final element of the programme was concluded on 1 July with the award of a contract to Capita Managed Services Ltd. for the running of the Companies House customer enquiry unit and the postal search and search accounts service in Cardiff.

The contract was awarded on the basis of best value for money after a competitive tender in line with EC procurement rules. It will run for three years with an option for Companies House to extend for a further two, one year periods. The contract commenced on 1 July, and 46 full and part-time staff involved in the activities transferred to the contractor.

In running the Postal Search and Search Accounts Service, Capita Managed Services Ltd. will be making records held by the registrar available for inspection by the public and providing copies of such records to the public. This is a function of the registrar determined by statute—Section 709 of the Companies Act 1985—and Capita Managed Services Ltd. has, therefore, been granted an authorisation for this purpose under the Contracting Out (Functions in Relation to the Registration of Companies) Order 1995.

Following agreement in December 1995, Companies House mainframe computer services have, since April this year, been provided under an extension to the DTI's existing contract with Hoskyns.

Competitive tendering has been carried out in respect of Companies House, London and the English satellite offices, Companies House, Edinburgh, and the remittance processing and office services functions at Companies House, Cardiff.

In each case, after careful evaluation of the bids, I concluded that best value for money would be obtained by retaining these activities in-house. This is a great tribute to the management and staff of Companies House who have worked hard over recent years to improve quality and cut costs. The contracting out process has identified significant further savings and these will result in an even more effective service for customers.

Patent Office

Mr. Batiste: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the agency review of the Patent Office has been completed; and if he will make a statement. [39615]

Mr. Lang: An evaluation report on the performance of the Patent Office since its inception as an executive agency in March 1990 has been completed, and a revised framework document has been prepared. Copies of these documents, which complete the agency review process, have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Export Intelligence System

Mr. Batiste: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will announce the results of his study into the value for money of the export intelligence system. [39616]

Mr. Nelson: I am pleased to report that the independent market research carried out for my Department by Metra Martech has found that in 1995 United kingdom firms earned between £300 million and £500 million of additional exports as a result of information provided under this system and that this represents at least £65 of additional exports for each £1 of support provided by the taxpayer. One in every four customers of the service did business as a result of its last year.

Subsidence Adviser

Mr. Batiste: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to receive the annual report of the subsidence adviser appointed under section 46 of the Coal Industry Act 1994. [39619]

Mr. Page: I have now received this report from the subsidence adviser and have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses today.

AEA Technology plc

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has for the privatisation of AEA Technology plc. [39638]

Mr. Page: The Government have consistently said that decisions on the future of AEA Technology—AEAT—would be taken in the light of the performance of the business and on a basis which meets the needs and requirements of customers and serves the best interests of the taxpayer.

AEAT has a strong management team led by Sir Anthony Cleaver and Dr. Peter Watson which has transformed the performance of the business over the past two years. However, the Government and AEAT management remain convinced that the company can realise its full commercial potential only in the private sector.

In the light of what has been achieved, the Government have now decided that AEAT should be privatised later this year. The intention is that, subject to market conditions, privatisation will proceed by way of a flotation on the London stock exchange. In preparing for the flotation, the Government will continue to pay particular regard to the interests of the taxpayer, the company and its employees. The Government also remain committed to ensuring the independence and impartiality of AEAT's services to its customers.

Stagecoach Holding plc

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how much the Monopolies and Mergers Commission spent in carrying out its investigation into the acquisition of Chesterfield Transport (1989) Ltd. by Stagecoach Holdings plc under the provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973; [38650]

(2) how much the Monopolies and Mergers Commission spent in carrying out its investigation into the acquisition of S.B. Holdings Ltd. by Stagecoach Holdings plc under the provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973; [38652]

(3) how much the Monopolies and Mergers Commission spent in carrying out its investigation into the acquisition of Lancaster City Transport Ltd. by Stagecoach Holdings plc under the provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973; [38654]

(4) how much the Monopolies and Mergers Commission spent in carrying out its investigation into the acquisition of Portsmouth Citybus Ltd. by Stagecoach Holdings plc under the provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973; [38656]

(5) how much the Monopolies and Mergers Commission spent in carrying out its investigation into the acquisition of Ayrshire Bus Owners Ltd. by Stagecoach Holdings plc under the provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973; [38651]

(6) how much the Monopolies and Mergers Commission spent in carrying out its investigation into the acquisition of Mainline Partnership Ltd. by Stagecoach Holdings plc under the provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973; [38653]

(7) how much the Monopolies and Mergers Commission spent in carrying out its investigation into the acquisition of Formia Ltd. by Stagecoach Holdings plc under the provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973. [38655]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The estimated costs in carrying out the investigations are as follows:

i Stagecoach Holdings plc/Lancaster City Transport Ltd.—£163,000

ii Stagecoach Holdings plc/Portsmouth Citybus Ltd.—£131,000

iii Stagecoach Holdings plc/Formia Ltd.—£68,000

iv Stagecoach Holdings plc/S B Holdings Ltd.—£242,000

v Stagecoach Holdings plc/Mainline Partnership Ltd.—£185,000

vi Stagecoach Holdings plc/Ayrshire Bus Owners (A1 Service) Ltd.—£232,000

vii Stagecoach Holdings plc/Chesterfield Transport (1989) Ltd.—£187,000

The MMC introduced revised costing and budgetary arrangements on 1 April 1995. Reported costs from this date are on accruals based accounts; those for earlier years are cash-based. In addition, overhead costs were attributed on an estimated basis for earlier years. The figures for the first five inquiries are therefore not directly comparable with those for the last two.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much Monopolies and Mergers Commission spent defending its actions against the application for judicial review in relation to the acquisition by Stagecoach Holdings plc of SB Holdings, the judgment in which case was made on 5 July. [38657]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The court has awarded the Monopolies and Mergers Commission its costs in these proceedings. At this stage it is not yet clear how much the total spend on MMC legal costs will be. The MMC's spend to date in relation to counsel's fees is £7,495.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how much the Department of Trade and Industry spent in defending its actions against the petition for judicial review brought by Stagecoach Holdings plc in the Court of Session, the judgment in which case was made on 20 June; [38660]

(2) how much the Monopolies and Mergers Commission spent in defending its actions against the petition for judicial review brought by Stagecoach Holdings plc in the Court of Session in relation to the company's acquisition of A1 Service, the judgment in which case was made on 20 June. [38659]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The court has awarded the Department and the Monopolies and Mergers Commission its costs in these

proceedings. The Department and the MMC were represented by the same counsel. Spend in relation to counsel's fees is about £25,800. Other legal costs have not yet been finalised.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much the Monopolies and Mergers Commission spent defending its actions against the application for judicial review in relation to the acquisition by Stagecoach Holdings plc of Mainline, the judgment in which case was made on 5 July. [38658]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The court has awarded the Monopolies and Mergers Commission its costs in these proceedings. At this stage it is not yet clear how much the total spend on MMC legal costs will be. The MMC's spend to date in relation to counsel's fees is £8,533.

Electric Shock Weapons

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received and what discussions he has held *(a)* within the UN and *(b)* with his EU counterparts about the possibility of a global ban on electric shock weapons. [38401]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* None.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects to announce the outcome of the review into the operation of public interest immunity certificates; and if he will make a statement. [38225]

The Attorney-General: On 26 February, I announced that the Government were to seek the views of interested parties about the use of public interest immunity certificates. Although responses were invited by 1 May, a number of late responses were received, including some very recently. The views of those who have responded are currently being carefully considered. I expect to announce the outcome of the Government's consideration of this issue once Parliament has resumed after the summer recess.

Marchioness Incident

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Attorney-General when the Crown Prosecution Service received the transcripts of the evidence given at the inquest which followed the sinking of the Marchioness; what factors have prevented a decision being taken on whether to initiate a prosecution; when such a decision is expected; and if he will make a statement. [39017]

The Attorney-General: The transcripts became available in stages, the final instalment having being received on Friday 15 December 1995. The Crown Prosecution Service has sought the advice of senior counsel. The matter is complex, but the Director of Public Prosecution expects to issue her decision very shortly.

Government Property Lawyers

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Attorney-General if he will announce the key performance targets for the Government Property Lawyers agency for 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [39660]

The Attorney-General: On 18 July 1995, I informed the House, *Official Report*, column *1037*, of the key performance targets which I had set for the Government Property Lawyers for 1995–96.

The agency has carried out its work to a high standard and has achieved the targets which I set. I have set the following targets for the agency for 1996–97:

To recover the full operating cost of the agency.

To achieve at least 4,350 new instructions from its clients.

To effect an average of 95 completions per caseholder.

To maintain and improve the quality of service in particular by keeping the proportion of cases completed satisfactorily—that is, without requiring rectification by reason of any fault of the agency—on or before the target date at or above 99.5 per cent.

Over the three-year-period, 1996–97 to 1998–99 to achieve a reduction in operating costs of an average of 2.5 per cent. per year in real terms taking 1996–97 as the base year.

I wish the chief executive and his staff another successful year.

Mr. Coombs: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects to *(a)* lay before Parliament and *(b)* publish the annual report and accounts of the Government Property Lawyers for the year 1995–96. [39661]

The Attorney-General: The annual report and accounts for the Government Property Lawyers was laid before Parliament this morning and then published.

Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Chessington Computer Centre

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what changes have been made to the performance targets of Chessington Computer Centre trading fund for the current year. [39633]

Mr. Freeman: The only change to the targets I gave in my answer on 1 April, *Official Report*, column *19*, is an adjustment to the financial surplus. As disclosed in the financial statement for the year ending 31 March 1996, the Chessington directors reassessed the carrying value of certain software assets and provision was made in these accounts for a diminution in value of these assets thus reducing future depreciation charges. Mainly as a result of these changes, the target operating surplus before interest has increased from £223,000 to £470,000.

DEFENCE

Gulf War

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for each armed service the number of people who served in the Gulf war who have

subsequently died *(a)* while serving in the armed services and *(b)* since they were discharged; and if he will show in each case the cause of their deaths. [35004]

Mr. Soames: Figures for service personnel who served in the Gulf war and have subsequently died since the end of that conflict, while serving, are shown in the table:

Deaths in service of personnel who served on OP Granby

Cause of death	*Army*	*Navy*	*RAF*
Injuries and poisoning	20	6	34
Neoplasms	4	1	4
Disorders of the circulatory system	1	2	4
Disorders of the nervous system and sense organs	0	0	1
Infections	0	0	1
Total	25	9	44

Information on the numbers of discharged service personnel who have died since the end of the Gulf war is not available.

I very much regret that in my answer of 12 June to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on this matter, *Official Report*, column *210*, the figure for the total number of service personnel who had died during the conflict and subsequently while still serving was incorrect. As at 19 July this year, the correct figure is 117.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the private finance initiative for the provision, maintenance and management of the RAF's United Kingdom requirement for cars, vans and minibuses. [38989]

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress with the private finance initiative project for the provision, maintenance and management of the Royal Air Force's United Kingdom requirement for cars, vans and minibuses. [39550]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am pleased to announce that, following a competition a contract will be placed with LEX Service, for the provision, maintenance and management of the majority of the RAF's UK fleet of cars, vans and minibuses. The RAF has harnessed the opportunities offered by the Government's private finance initiative to secure private sector capital investment and management expertise for these vehicle services. A firm price five-year contract has been negotiated and savings of approximately £17 million are expected over the duration of the contract. The scheme will save money for the taxpayer, maintain the standard of service at less cost and allow the RAF to concentrate on its core business.

Greenham Common Airbase Accident

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information has been released by the Government concerning the accident at Greenham Common airbase on 28 February 1958; what recent reassessment he has carried out of the validity of the conclusions of the 1961 Aldermaston report on the accident; and what are the current health implications of that accident. [39134]

Mr. Soames: To detail all of the information released by the Government relating to this accident, which occurred almost 40 years ago, would involve disproportionate cost. My Department has recently released two previously classified reports on radioactivity measurements in the Greenham Common area and an unclassified report, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. The National Radiological Protection Board has carried out an independent assessment of the findings of the 1961 Aldermaston report and considered also the later reports published in 1986 and 1994. The NRPB announced on 18 July that if the data in the 1961 report are correct, the indications are that the radiological impact would have been negligible. The NRPB will also be carrying out a limited programme of measurements to provide further reassurance. We believe that the levels quoted in the 1961 report are well below any public health significance, and no subsequent monitoring in the area has found any elevated measurements.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 16 July, *Official Report*, column *484*, if he will place in the Library a copy of the paper on uranium and plutonium contamination around the Greenham Common airforce base when it is released to the Public Record Office. [39053]

Mr. Soames: Copies of the 1961 report have already been placed in the Library of the House, together with copies of a reassessment report on the 1961 findings, prepared in 1986.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 16 July, *Official Report*, column *485*, if he will list by date and locations the seven category one accidents involving nuclear weapons to which he refers; and if he will provide details in each case. [39052]

Mr. Soames: No. It remains our policy neither to confirm nor to deny the presence of nuclear weapons at any particular time or place.

Forces Personnel (Commercial Organisations)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidelines govern the use of armed forces personnel by commercial organisations; and if he will publish them. [38687]

Mr. Soames: Service personnel are permitted to undertake employment during leave or off-duty hours with the approval of their commanding officer. Such approval may be given only if the activity in question does not contravene the relevant regulations which are to be found in Queen's regulations. Authority may be given provided that uniform is not worn, the service is not brought into disrepute and service knowledge is not used for the benefit of business. There are certain categories of employment in which service personnel are not permitted to undertake employment.

The regulations are contained in the Queen's regulations for all the three services, copies of which are held in the Library of the House. Copies are also available from HMSO.

Vessel Transfers

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what are the inspection arrangements for the vessels to be transferred to Serco-Denholm by officials of the marine safety agency; what is the timetable for such inspection; if Serco-Denholm will be responsible for ensuring that those vessels judged to be in an unsatisfactory condition are brought up to MSA requirements; and if he will make a statement; [38895]

(2) what assessment he has made of whether the royal maritime auxiliary service vessels which are to be handed over to Serco-Denholm comply with MSA regulations; and if he will make a statement; [38890]

(3) if he will make a statement on the financial arrangements he has entered into in relation to the transfer of royal maritime auxiliary service vessels to Serco-Denholm; [38905]

(4) what guarantees have been sought by Serco-Denholm in relation to the seaworthiness of the RMSA vessels which are to be transferred to the consortium; and if he will make a statement; [38889]

(5) what financial arrangements he has entered into with Serco-Denholm concerning the construction of vessels needed to service the Ministry of Defence contract; and if he will make a statement. [38943]

Mr. Soames: All RMAS vessels to be used by Serco-Denholm in fulfilment of its contract with my Department are being inspected by my officials and an independent Lloyd's surveyor as part of the process of ensuring that they comply with current Ministry of Defence safety standards.

Following contract effective date on 12 August, Serco-Denholm will, as the contract requires, be responsible for ensuring that the vessels meet the standards of safety and certification operating in the commercial shipping industry and regulated by the marine safety agency (MSA).

Initially the vessels will be supplied as Government furnished equipment but, after achievement of MSA certification, they will be chartered on normal commercial terms by Serco-Denholm. No financial arrangements have been entered into with Serco-Denholm concerning the construction of vessels. The vessels will remain Government-owned assets and the responsibility for procuring any replacements will rest with my Department.

Wimbledon Tennis Championship

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces worked as stewards at the 1996 Wimbledon lawn tennis championship; how they were selected; if they were recompensed for the work; what was the total cost of the service; and what proportion of this was borne *(a)* by the championship organisers and *(b)* from public funds. [38686]

Mr. Soames: The total number of members of the armed forces who worked as stewards at the 1996 Wimbledon lawn tennis championship was 275.

Service personnel volunteer for duties at the Wimbledon tennis championships as part of a historical association stretching back to 1946. They are allowed to wear service uniform, but are required to take annual leave. They are not paid for their participation but are recompensed for their expenses by the championship organisers—the All England tennis club.

There is no cost to public funds.

Trident

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's latest planning assumption for the outstanding number of Trident D5 missiles to be procured from the United States of America. [39178]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Our current planning assumptions are that a further 21 Trident missiles will be purchased in three batches of seven in US fiscal years 1997, 1998 and 1999.

Procurement Announcements

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department last announced a major defence procurement order during a parliamentary recess; what is his Department's policy concerning the announcement of large procurement projects when Parliament is not sitting; and if he will make a statement. [39067]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We make announcements on major defence procurement orders at the earliest convenient time after decisions have been made. In practice, we usually make such announcements when Parliament is sitting.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the total Trident missile purchase *(a)* will be deployed operationally, *(b)* will act as a processing margin and *(c)* will be used for test firings. [39179]

Mr. Arbuthnot: On the basis of present assumptions, some three quarters of our currently planned Trident missile purchase will be available for operational deployment; a fifth are planned to be used during post-build or post-refit firings; the remainder will act as a processing margin.

HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) of 18 July, when he expects *(a)* HMS Albion and *(b)* HMS Bulwark to come into service. [39068]

Mr. Arbuthnot: HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark are both expected to enter service early in the next decade.

Air-launched Anti-armour Missile

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the military reasons underlying the requirement for an air-launched anti-armour missile capability. [39177]

Mr. Arbuthnot: An advanced air-launched anti-armour weapon is needed to provide a capability against modern main battle tanks and other armoured vehicles that can be deployed rapidly to and around the battlefield; and which will enable us to attack enemy

forces at long range and before contact with our own ground forces. It will thus complement the attack helicopter, which is designed to operate at shorter range. Its stand-off capability will keep our aircrew and aircraft losses to a minimum.

Defence Communication Services

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about Defence agency status for defence communication services.[39548]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Currently responsibilities for Defence wide-area communications systems and information transfer services are spread widely across my Department. Staff currently employed in these areas number approximately 2,200 located in about 150 sites throughout the UK and overseas. The UK elements of these are likely to reduce considerably as the transfer of most of the Defence fixed telecommunications systems to the private sector takes place.

Responsibility for the remainder of the Defence wide-area communications systems and information services is to be rationalised and considered as a candidate for Defence agency status—as the Defence Communications Services Agency—under the next steps initiative.

A study is being undertaken to establish whether agency status or other options would be appropriate. I would welcome comments from interested parties. These should be sent to:

Major General W. J. P. Robins
DGICS
Ministry of Defence
Room 1253
Main Building
Whitehall
London
SW1A 2HB

Defence Exports

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the review of the convention relating to the disclosure of information to Parliament on the export of defence equipment has been completed; and if he will make a statement. [39551]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It has been the practice of Ministers in successive Administrations to decline, on grounds of public policy, to answer questions about arms sales, although some information is provided to Parliament, for example by placing the UK's submission to the UN Arms Register in the Library of the House. An examination of this convention was commissioned following the publication of Sir Richard Scott's report.

As explained in the background note placed in the Library of the House on 26 February by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Government's policy on defence sales is based on respect for the right of other countries, as sovereign states, to protect their independence and exercise their inherent right to self-defence as recognised by the UN charter. The Government also place considerable importance on the maintenance of a healthy defence industry which supports overall some 400,000 jobs, 80,000 of which are dependent on defence exports. Last year, British defence equipment manufacturers won contracts worth some £5 billion and the size of our export market is a major factor in protecting the security of supply and reducing the cost of the same equipment to our own forces. It therefore remains Government policy to support the sale of British defence equipment overseas wherever it is compatible with our political, strategic and security interests and to grant export licences on a case-by-case basis in the light of established criteria including internationally agreed guidelines and our treaty and other international commitments.

There are four main reasons why, on occasions, information about defence exports should not be publicly disclosed. First, our national security may be jeopardised if a third country obtains details of an importing ally's defence inventory. Secondly, importing nations have their own legitimate security concerns and therefore an interest in protecting information about the detail of their defence inventory or, even on occasion, its composition. Exporters not prepared to respect these considerations will be seriously disadvantaged. Thirdly, providing competitors with commercially sensitive information may weaken the competitive position of British exporters, leading to lost orders and serious industrial consequences, not necessarily limited to the export of defence equipment. Fourthly, our bilateral relations with other countries might be weakened, potentially resulting in the dilution of the UK's influence.

The Government share Sir Richard Scott's view that commercial confidentiality may, in many cases, continue to constitute a valid reason for withholding certain categories of information. The code of practice on access to Government information (Cm 2290) recognises the need to respect a third party's commercial confidences and other information given in confidence. It also recognises defence, security and international relations as reasons for withholding information. Nevertheless, these considerations need to be balanced against legitimate parliamentary and public interest in the provision of information about British defence exports, which are controlled strictly in accordance with our international obligations. We have therefore decided that we shall in future answer questions about defence exports as fully as the four constraints outlined above permit. Any exceptions will meet the test in the code of practice that the harm or prejudice which might arise from disclosure outweighs the public interest in making such information available.

A number of other countries provide annual reports on defence exports, containing varying degrees of detail. The Government propose in future to include as part of the annual statement on the Defence estimates a report about defence equipment exports to supplement the information already provided elsewhere.

Two other reviews arising from Sir Richard Scott's report are continuing which are relevant to the provision of information on defence equipment exports. Ministerial accountability and responsibility are under examination in another place by the Public Service Committee which has been asked by the Defence Select Committee to take account of the latter's submission, including the recommendation that Select Committee Chairmen be given, in confidence, details of the background when a

Minister does not give a full answer to a parliamentary question. The examination of export control legislation being led by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will include all issues relevant to strategic export licensing and procedures. The Ministry of Defence will be closely involved with both of these reviews.

I am today placing in the Libraries of both Houses a more detailed account of the review just completed.

HEALTH

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many staff were employed full-time or part-time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94; [39419]

(2) what is the cost budgeted for staff, employed full-time or part-time, to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39444]

(3) how many staff are assumed in his Department's budget, employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, *(a)* to work on the press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39367]

(4) what was the cost of staff employed full-time or part-time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work on the press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94; [39411]

(5) what is his Department's budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media. [39349]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

Prescriptions

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions were dispensed in each year since 1979; and how many were free of charge. [38010]

Mr. Malone: The available information is in the table.

Year	*Exempt*	*Free contraceptives*	*Total dispensed*
1979	181.3	4.2	304.6
1980	192.6	4.6	303.3
1981	200.0	5.2	300.0
1982	210.4	6.0	311.3
1983	220.7	6.2	315.3
1984	226.5	6.9	320.5
1985	232.6	5.9	318.7
1986	241.3	5.3	322.5
1987	253.9	5.1	335.3
1988	263.5	5.3	346.5
1989	268.1	5.6	351.9
1990	276.9	5.9	360.5
1991	290.5	5.9	370.7
1992	307.0	6.1	386.8
1993	326.6	6.2	405.1
1994	336.1	6.3	414.1

1. The analysis is based on a 1 in 20 sample of all prescriptions submitted to the Prescription Pricing Authority by community pharmacists and appliances contractors. Dispensing doctor and personal administration prescriptions are not analysed into exempt, non-exempt or other categories.

2. 1979 to 1990 data is based on fees and covers prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors only.

3. 1991 to 1994 data (new PCA) are based on items and have the same coverage as in note 1 above.

Dental Services

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission a study into the provision of, and access to, NHS dentistry; and if he will make a statement. [39227]

Mr. Malone: We keep in regular contact with health authorities on the provision of, and access to, national health service dentistry across England.

Cancer Commission Groups (Trent)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what terms of reference he has given Trent National Health Service Executive in respect of cancer commission groups; and if he will make a statement. [39229]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health issued guidance on 15 March 1996 asking National Health Service Executive regional offices to have a role in designation of cancer centres, facilitating the local work of health authorities, general practitioners, and trusts, particularly on cross district issues. Regional co-ordinators are expected to help develop a regional strategy.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the membership of Trent NHS Executive cancer commission groups. [39230]

Mr. Horam: National Health Service Executive, Trent has set up cancer commissioning groups for southern Derbyshire, Leicestershire, north Trent and Nottinghamshire/Lincolnshire. The membership of each group is set out:

	Cancer commission group
Southern Derbyshire	
Dr. L. Adamson	Medical Director, Southern Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Trust
Dr. J. R. M. Bateman	Medical Director, Derby City General Hospital NHS Trust
Dr. A. Benghiat	Lead Clinician, Derby Cancer Centre (Chairman)
Mr. T. Bucknall	Lead Clinician, Burton Cancer Unit
Mrs. J. Butler	Chief Executive, Southern Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Trust
Mr. I. Hall	Project Manager, Derby Cancer Centre
Dr. C. Kenny	Consultant in Public Health Medicine, Southern Derbyshire Health Authority
Mr. J. MacDonald	Chief Executive, Derbyshire Royal Infirmary NHS Trust
Mr. M. Scott	Chief Executive, Derby City General Hospital NHS Trust
Mr. J. R. Nash	Medical Director, Derbyshire Royal Infirmary NHS Trust
Dr. M. J. Trelinski	representing South Staffordshire GPs
Dr. B. Hands	representing Southern Derbyshire GPs
Dr. J. Walsworth-Bell	representing South Staffordshire Health Authority
Mrs. P. Cooke	Chairman, Southern Derbyshire Community Health Council

	Cancer commission group
Leicestershire	
Dr. B. J. Crump	Director of Public Health, Leicestershire Health Authority
Mr. P. Homa	Chief Executive, Leicester Royal Infirmary NHS Trust
Mr. N. J. Naftalin	Medical Director, Leicester Royal Infirmary NHS Trust
Dr. A. C. B. Wicks	Medical Director, Leicester General Hospital NHS Trust
Mr. T. Spotswood	Director of Contracts, Leicester General Hospital NHS Trust
Mr. J. S. Willetts	Chief Executive, Glenfield Hospital NHS Trust
Dr. A. G. H. Cole	Medical Director, Glenfield Hospital NHS Trust
Mr. R. H. Bettles	Chief Executive, Fosse Health NHS Trust
Dr. M. A. Edgar	Medical Director, Fosse Health NHS Trust
North Trent	
Mr. R. Ackroyd	Chief Executive, Barnsley Health Authority
Dr. D. Birks	Director of Public Health, Barnsley Health Authority
Mr. J. Newton	Chief Executive, Doncaster Health Authority
Dr. J. Radford	Consultant in Public Health Medicine, Doncaster Health Authority
Mr. C. Fewtrell	Chief Executive, North Derbyshire Health Authority
Dr. A. Charlesworth	Director of Public Health, North Derbyshire Health Authority
Mr. N. Clifton	Chief Executive, North Nottinghamshire Health Authority
Dr. R. Richards	Consultant in Public Health Medicine, North Nottinghamshire Health Authority
Mr. J. Hinchcliffe	Chief Executive, Rotherham Health Authority
Dr. T. Patterson	Director of Public Health, Rotherham Health Authority
Ms C. Hamlyn	Chief Executive, Sheffield Health Authority
Mr. T. Plant	Sheffield Health Authority
Mr. C. Dench	Chief Executive, South Humber Health Authority
Dr. B. Crompton	GP Adviser, South Humber Health Authority
Nottinghamshire/ Lincolnshire	
Dr. S. Wilson	Director of Public Health, Nottingham Health Authority
H. Wilkinson	Contracting Lead Officer, Nottinghamshire Health Authority
Dr. R. Richards	Lead Officer, North Nottinghamshire Health
K. Powis	Contracting Lead Officer, North Nottinghamshire Health Authority
Dr. B. Rana	Lead Officer, Lincolnshire Health Authority
Mr. R. Banyard	Contracting Lead Officer, Lincolnshire Health Authority
Dr. S. Ford	Nottinghamshire Local Medical Committee
Dr. V. Zbizczniak	Lincolnshire Local Medical Committee
Dr. P. Jones	Nottinghamshire Local Medical Committee
Dr. Crompton	Lead Officer, South Humber Health Authority
Liz Mitchell	Project Manager, Nottingham/Lincoln Cancer Centre

Hepatitis C

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to provide payments to those haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C; and if he will make a statement. [39456]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Nottingham, East, (Mr. Heppell) on 8 July, *Official Report*, column *21*.

Tardive Dyskinesia

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission a study into *(a)* tardive dyskinesia and minor abnormalities, *(b)* schizophrenia and minor physical abnormalities and *(c)* tardive dyskinesia and negative symptoms; and if he will make a statement. [39216]

Mr. Bowis: The links between Tardive Dyskinesia, minor physical abnormalities and negative symptoms are already well researched.

Medical Records

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average charge levied on patients for seeing their medical records. [39270]

Mr. Horam: The Access to Health Records Act 1990 allows the record holder to charge a fee of up to £10. A similar fee is permitted when access is sought under the Data Protection Act 1984. Where a copy of a record or extract is supplied, the Access to Health Records Act also permits a charge to be made to cover the cost of making the copy and of any postage.

Factor 8

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide funding for the purchase of recombinant factor 8 by haemophiliacs. [39457]

Mr. Horam: The Department does not allocate money to support specific treatments for particular patient groups. National health service funds are allocated to purchasers of health care who are in the best position to decide what services, including treatments, they wish to purchase to meet local needs.

Depression

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission a study into the efficacy of Flesinoxan in the prevention of relapse during the continuation phase following acute treatment of a major depressive episode; and if he will make a statement. [39215]

Mr. Bowis: No. Clinical trials to determine the safety and efficacy of pharmaceutical products are usually commissioned by the companies that own them.

Wheelchairs

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average charge made to patients provided with wheelchair by hospitals. [39257]

Mr. Bowis: Wheelchairs provided by the national health service are issued free on loan.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 27 June, *Official Report*, column *194*, about guidance to wheelchair centres, what guidance has been issued concerning the changes to the provision of indoor-outdoor wheelchairs announced on

23 February, beyond the NHS Executive document HSG(96)34; and when disabled people can expect to benefit from these changes. [39173]

Mr. Bowis: Health authorities and wheelchair service centres are now setting up local arrangements in accordance with the guidance in HSG(96)34. We expect that the first powered indoor/outdoor wheelchairs will be available very soon.

NHS Pensions Agency

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the annual report and accounts of the NHS Pensions Agency. [39552]

Mr. Horam: I have approved the report and accounts which has today been laid before both Houses of Parliament in accordance with the requirements of section 5(2) and 5(3) of the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1921. Copies have also been placed in the Library.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what surveys have been conducted on the health of health care workers who have tended CJD patients. [36938]

Mr. Horam: No such surveys have been conducted. The national Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease surveillance unit investigates the incidence and epidemiology of CJD, paying particular attention to occupation and eating habits so that any change in the pattern of CJD following the advent of BSE can be detected. This includes details of a patients' occupation and the latest results are published in the unit's fourth annual report, copies of which are available in the Library, and do not show any evidence of an occupational link.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's definition of a highly suspect case of CJC. [36939]

Mr. Horam: The term "highly suspect case" is not used in respect of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. This disease can be definitely confirmed only by electron microscope examination of brain tissue. This is usually done post mortem although rarely it may be possible to establish a definite diagnosis by brain biopsy while the patient is still alive. In other cases CJC can be no more than a possibility, greater or lesser according to the number and degree of clinical features a patient exhibits.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the implications of the court ruling relating to Credit Suisse and Allerdale borough council on PFI funding for NHS trusts. [37818]

Mr. Horam: National health service trusts are aware of the need to confirm with their lawyers that contractual agreements entered into in the course of private finance initiative projects are within their statutory powers.

Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional guidance he plans to issue on the impact of the Appeal Court judgment in the case of Michael Berry and Gloucestershire county council on the legal duties of local authorities under section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970; and if he will make a statement. [38298]

Mr. Bowis: Leave to appeal to the House of Lords has been granted in this case. The Department will consider whether to revise any of its guidance in the light of the House of Lords judgment.

Latex Surgical Gloves

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated in respect of protein levels in latex surgical gloves; and if he will make a statement; [38267]

(2) what routine monitoring his Department undertakes in respect of allergic reactions experienced by NHS staff to proteins in latex surgical gloves; [38268]

(3) what assessment he has made of the levels of proteins in latex surgical gloves purchased by the NHS. [38269]

Mr. Horam: No specific research has been commissioned on protein levels in latex surgical gloves. The available information on the subject has been evaluated and relevant experts in the field have been consulted. The Medical Devices Agency published a device bulletin entitled "Latex Sensitisation in the Health Care Setting (Use of Latex Gloves)", copies of which are available in the Library. The Department does not undertake specific monitoring of allergic reactions experienced by national health service staff to proteins in latex surgical gloves. However the Medical Devices Agency has a system for investigating adverse incidents associated with all medical devices.

Operations (Children)

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many procedures were carried out per 100,000 children aged up to 16 years old for each of the last 10 years for *(a)* myringotomy, *(b)* adenoidectomy and *(c)* tonsillectomy. [38270]

Mr. Horam: The information available for national health service hospitals in England is shown in the table. The latest year for which information is available is 1994–95; prior to 1989–90, data to the level of detail requested were not held centrally.

	Myringotomy	*Adenoidectomy*	*Tonsillectomy*
1989–90	51	173	449
1990–91	51	162	466
1991–92	68	173	501
1992–93	61	169	510
1993–94	38	155	522
1994–95	35	162	534

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics—as related to Child population.

Prodigy System

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if the drugs and preparations listed in each therapeutic area covered by Prodigy match those in the British National Formulary. [38271]

(2) what assessment he has made of the choice provided to general practitioners by the Prodigy system in each therapeutic area; [38272]

(3) if at the preparation stage of the database incorporated into Prodigy, and before the list was reviewed by the Royal College's *(a)* medical experts in particular therapeutic areas and *(b)* patients and patients group were given the opportunity to provide input into the preparation of the drugs list specific to those areas. [38274]

Mr. Malone: The therapeutic recommendations used for phase 1 of the Prodigy trial were intended to permit a realistic test of the concept of computerised decision support for general practitioner prescribing. To ensure that they were suitable for this purpose and had the support of a substantial body of medical opinion, an expert group nominated by the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Royal College of Physicians, the General Medical Services Committee of the British Medical Association, and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, was commissioned to validate them. A number of sources were used including the British National Formulary. The recommendations will be further developed in the course of the trial in the light of comments from the GPs participating.

If at the end of the trial it is decided to develop a system for more widespread use, based on the experience gathered in the Prodigy trial, there will be extensive consultation in which all interested parties will have the opportunity to provide input.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress with the pilot study of the Prodigy system. [38273]

Mr. Malone: Phase 1 of the Prodigy project on computerised decision support for general practitioner prescribing has been running in 140 GP practices since the end of 1995. An interim report, together with hard copy of the therapeutic advice and prescribing recommendations used in the initial phase of the evaluation, will be published next week; copies will be placed in the Library.

Patient Information Leaflets

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of ways of presenting the benefits of medicines to patients as well as their known side-effects in the proposed patient information leaflet. [38286]

Mr. Malone: Patient information leaflets are drawn up in line with European directive 92/27/EEC which prescribes the information which must be conveyed to the patient in such a leaflet. Guidance for the pharmaceutical industry on the preparation of leaflets was provided in 1993.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to proceed with the patient information leaflet initiative; and what have been the reasons for the delay. [38285]

Mr. Malone: European directive 92/27/EEC requires that a patient information leaflet be supplied with all medicines within five years of its implementation on 1 January 1994. Agreement was reached with the pharmaceutical industry to introduce the information prescribed by the directive for the products in each therapeutic category of medicine simultaneously. A phased programme to do this began in December 1995 and will continue until the end of 1998.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who is responsible for deciding the suitability of the content of patient information leaflets. [38287]

Mr. Malone: Patient information leaflets provided with medicinal products are drawn up by the marketing authorisation holder and are approved for use by the Medicines Control Agency.

Acne (Treatment)

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the cost effectiveness of roaccutane as an alternative treatment for acne. [38288]

Mr. Horam: None.

Medicines (Cost-effectiveness)

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the routine procedures for assessing the cost-effectiveness of one medicine against another. [38289]

Mr. Malone: Guidance on the conduct of economic evaluations of medicines was issued jointly by the Department of Health and the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry in 1994. Guidance to health authorities and purchasers asks them to take account of evidence on both clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness in determining local prescribing policies. The clinicians who make prescribing decisions in individual cases have access to a wide range of information to help assess the relative clinical and cost effectiveness of alternative treatments.

Excimer Laser Treatment

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies have been *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated by his Department on the safety and effectiveness of excimer laser treatment; and what (i) guidance and (ii) regulations he has issued concerning excimer laser treatment. [38673]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health has not commissioned or evaluated any studies on the safety and effectiveness of excimer laser treatment.

The Medical Devices Agency issued guidance on the safe use of lasers in medical and dental practice in early 1996.

Part II of the Registered Homes Act 1984 and the Nursing Homes and Mental Nursing Homes Regulations 1984, taken together, require that premises using or intending to use potentially hazardous lasers, which can be used for medical treatment purposes, be registered under the Act.

Dysentery and Food Poisoning

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of *(a)* dysentery and *(b)* food

poisoning there were in (i) York, (ii) North Yorkshire, (iii) Yorkshire and (iv) England in each year since 1990. [38926]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is published annually in series MB2 "Communicable disease statistics". The latest available publication is series MB2 No. 21 (1994), copies of which are available in the Library.

Data for 1995 are given in the table:

	Dysentery	*Food poisoning (All)*
York	3	109
North Yorkshire	15	1,266
Yorkshire[1]	681	8,832
England	4,373	75,499

[1] Yorkshire is defined as the sum of North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire.

General Practitioners

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new general practitioners have entered general practice in each of the last five years; and how many have retired. [39057]

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the table:

General practitioner stocks and flows unrestricted principals at 1 October, England and Wales

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Stock	27,150	27,340	27,650	27,990	28,280	28,420
Joiners	1,380	1,560	1,440	1,420	1,480	—
New joiners	1,160	1,340	1,210	1,100	1,270	—
Rejoiners	220	220	230	320	210	—
Leavers[1]	1,510	1,250	1,100	1,130	1,340	—
Change in stock	+ 130	+ 310	+ 340	+ 290	+ 140	—

Source:
GP Census.
Note:
[1] Information is not collected centrally on the number of GPs retiring.

Nurses

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to include nurses in the commission process of health services. [39061]

Mr. Malone: The Health Authority Act 1995 requires every health authority to make arrangements for securing professional advice.

Prescriptions

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will resume consultations with dispensing doctors on the patient signing arrangements for NHS prescriptions. [39069]

Mr. Malone: We intend to approach the General Medical Services Committee of the British Medical Association shortly.

Diabetic Care

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he has made on the proposals of the British Diabetic Association and Department of Health task force to improve diabetic care. [39059]

Mr. Horam: The National Health Service Executive has disseminated the report of the Department of Health and British Diabetic Association St. Vincent joint task force for diabetes to health authorities and asked them to take account of the recommendations in planning local diabetes services. It is for local health authorities to decide on the priority they give to developing such services.

In addition, a diabetes subgroup of the clinical outcomes group has been set up to develop service guidance for purchasers, based on the recommendations of the task force. The subgroup's membership includes representatives of health authorities and trusts, nurses, general practitioners, patients, and the British Diabetic Association. The subgroup expects to complete its work by the end of 1996.

Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to paragraph 2.7 of his Department's report on the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme, on what basis his Department agreed 20 per cent. as the allowable level of research and development costs. [39022]

Mr. Malone: The research and development carried out in the United Kingdom rose steadily through the 1970s and early 1980s. The Government agreed with the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry in 1986 that support for research and development would be maintained at the then current level of around 20 per cent. of pharmaceutical sales to the national health service. That agreement was continued in 1993.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he proposes to publish a report to Parliament on the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme annually. [39032]

Mr. Malone: Following the first report to Parliament, submitted in May, I plan to make further reports on a regular basis.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to paragraph 1 of his Department's report on the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme, what factors underlay the discrepancy between the companies' figure for total home profits and the Department's outturn figures. [39031]

Mr. Malone: Under paragraph 4.8 of the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme, the Department may question any figures which do not appear to be consistent with the requirements of the scheme. The difference between the company figures and the outturn figures shown in table 1 of the report to Parliament reflects the figures accepted in negotiation as reasonable for the national health service and the taxpayer to bear.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will supplement the information provided in his Department's report on the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme in respect of the nature of the research and development work carried out with funding provided under the scheme. [39001]

Mr. Malone: The pharmaceutical price regulation scheme does not provide funding for research and development, but allows as a cost a proportion of companies' spending. Research priorities are determined by the companies.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the factors underlying the sums spent by the United Kingdom relative to those spent by its major competitors on pharmaceutical research related to worldwide pharmaceutical development. [39023]

Mr. Malone: The "Research and Development Scoreboard", published earlier this month, shows that expenditure on research by the pharmaceutical industry in the United Kingdom is comparable to its major competitors worldwide.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to paragraphs 2.4.1 and 2.4.2 of his department's report on the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme, if he will make a statement on the criteria used by his Department when it agreed a profitability range of 17 per cent. to 21 per cent. return on capital; what criteria are used to determine where on the range an individual company is placed; how the profitability of companies covered by the scheme compares with movements in the FT500 index; and how his Department measures the degree of a company's long-term commitment to the United Kingdom pharmaceutical market. [39029]

Mr. Malone: The range of target profitability under the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme allows pharmaceutical companies to earn profits in line with the average profitability of companies in other sectors of United Kingdom industry. The range was established taking account of the FT500 index, and is subject to review in the light of movements in that index, but was agreed in negotiation with the industry, not by a set formula. Individual companies are placed within that range in the light of factors which they can show to demonstrate their long-term commitment to supplying the medicines which the national health service needs. These factors are established and assessed in negotiation.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his Department's report on the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme what factors underlay his Department not being able, at 30 April, to finalise agreed outcome figures on the annual financial returns from companies for *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994; how many companies are outstanding for each year; and what action his Department is taking to finalise outcome figures more quickly. [39030]

Mr. Malone: Clearance of annual financial returns is dependent on completing negotiations with companies, which may be both complicated and time consuming. In addition there has been delay due to the extra work arising from the negotiation of the new pharmaceutical price regulation scheme in 1993 and from subsequent policy initiatives. On 30 June 1996 six AFRs from 1992, 14 from 1993 and 35 from 1994 remained unfinished.

Steps are being taken to clear this backlog.

Nursing Staff Accommodation

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to privatise nursing accommodation. [39063]

Mr. Malone: It is for national health service trusts to determine, as part of their recruitment and retention policies, what staff residential accommodation they require and how that accommodation is to be provided.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued in respect of the provision of accommodation to nursing students. [39062]

Mr. Malone: The guidance HSG(93)6, issued on 28 January 1993, advises national health service employers on the provision of accommodation for Project 2000 students. Copies are available in the Library.

Wheelchairs

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide a list of all wheelchair centres in England and Wales. [39172]

Mr. Bowis: I will arrange for copies of the directory "Addresses of NHS Wheelchair Services" to be placed in the Library shortly.

General Practitioners

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of general practitioners reaching the ages of *(a)* 65 and *(b)* 70 years in each of the next five years. [39058]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is shown in the table:

Estimated number of Unrestricted Principals reaching age 65–70 over next 5 years in England and Wales.

Year	*Reaching 65*	*Reaching 70*
1996	190	54
1997	221	53
1998	276	72
1999	289	91
2000	375	113

Source:
General Medical Services Census, 1 October 1995.
Estimates are based on the age of Unrestricted Principals at 1 October 1995.

Nurses (Pension Schemes)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to include practice nurses in NHS pension schemes; and what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of this. [39060]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 17 June, *Official Report*, column *352*.

Human Embryos

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many human embryos will be unfrozen and destroyed on 1 August; and what arrangements he is making to ensure that they are disposed of in a respectful manner. [39035]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 25 June, *Official Report*, columns *85–86*. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority is compiling figures on contacts made by the clinics with couples whose embryos have been store since before 1 August 1991. This information will not be complete until after 31 July.

Guidance on disposal arrangements is given in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's code of practice.

Operations (Waiting Times)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the current median waiting periods for patients needing hip replacement treatment at *(a)* each hospital where this operation is provided and *(b)* in England, and the equivalent waiting times for the two preceding years; [37497]

(2) if he will list the current median waiting periods for patients needing cataract treatment, *(a)* at each hospital where this operation is provided and *(b)* in England, and the equivalent waiting time for the two preceding years. [37498]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 19 July 1996]:* Current median waiting times are not available centrally. Information for the latest years available has been placed in the Library.

Secondary Care

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many registered medical practitioners hold chairs in secondary care in United Kingdom universities and medical schools. [38394]

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available centrally.

SCOTLAND

New Prisons

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the proposed start date for the construction of the new prison at Bowhouse, Kilmarnock; [37350]

(2) what sites in Scotland are being currently considered for new prisons. [37351]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Negotiations with private sector consortia for the new privately financed prison await the outcome of the application for outline planning permission now with East Ayrshire council. Subject to outline approval being granted readily, construction work might be expected to begin in late 1997 or early 1998. As for further new prisons, local authorities in the central belt of Scotland are to be approached in the near future with a view to identifying potential prison sites in this area.

Hospital Readmissions

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each NHS trust in Scotland the number of patients readmitted within one month of discharge in each of the last five years. [38396]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is laid out in the table. The reason for a patient being readmitted is not necessarily related to the reason for original admission. The longer after discharge that a patient is readmitted, the less likely the reasons are related.

Readmissions within 28 days of discharge

NHS Trust	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust	998	1,293	3,499	3,985	4,162
North Ayrshire Hospitals and Arran NHS Trust	2,813	3,157	3,493	5,259	4,659
Ayrshire and Arran Community Health Care NHS Trust	992	836	230	232	246
Borders General Hospital Acute Unit	1,207	1,328	1,598	1,701	1,869
Borders Community Health Services	239	232	147	219	242
Dumbarton Unit	728	979	1,173	1,324	1,565
Argyll and Bute Unit	862	968	1,017	1,190	1,117
Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	2,059	2,580	2,988	3,677	3,417
Inverclyde Royal NHS Trust	1,623	1,805	1,901	1,842	2,113
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust	131	156	170	146	167
Queen Margaret Hospital NHS Trust	2	3	18	1,470	2,498
Fife Healthcare NHS Trust	1,235	1,508	1,684	1,210	508
Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	2,284	2,620	2,918	2,697	3,330
Continuing Care for the Elderly Unit	3,250	2,200	1,037	107	79
Southern General Hospital NHS Trust	3,160	2,746	3,304	3,620	4,330
The Yorkhill NHS Trust	3,717	3,382	2,836	3,449	4,248
The Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust	2,259	2,589	3,229	3,622	3,651
West Glasgow Hospitals University NHS Trust	6,916	8,828	10,246	13,456	13,952
Glasgow Royal Infirmary University NHS Trust	6,291	7,313	7,810	9,196	9,404
Stobhill NHS Trust	4,413	4,119	4,795	5,540	5,430
Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust	2,203	2,311	2,731	2,645	3,224
Caithness and Sunderland NHS Trust	378	340	522	500	612
Highland Communities NHS Trust	446	403	473	590	737
Community and Priority Services Unit	142	142	179	167	179
Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals NHS Trust	3,136	3,358	3,548	4,026	4,161
Law Hospitals NHS Trust	2,468	2,702	3,080	3,382	3,950
Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals NHS Trust	2,642	2,982	3,715	5,254	5,636
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	6,818	7,315	7,776	7,887	6,202
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust	1,544	1,370	1,396	1,546	1,528
Moray Health Services NHS Trust	545	553	537	680	894
Orkney Health Board Unit	176	239	209	228	281
West Lothian NHS Trust	1,945	2,218	2,633	2,670	2,832
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust	6,682	6,790	7,624	8,408	9,570

Readmissions within 28 days of discharge

NHS Trust	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Edinburgh Sick Children's NHS Trust	1,287	1,437	1,571	1,749	1,752
Western General Hospitals NHS Trust	4,800	6,673	8,475	10,979	12,092
East and Midlothian NHS Trust	1,131	1,124	1,433	1,535	1,681
Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust	429	317	90	103	117
Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	5,128	5,501	5,456	6,432	6,945
Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust	1,362	1,489	1,708	1,991	2,258
Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust	272	343	253	252	280
Agnus NHS Trust	907	909	944	1,095	1,331
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	2,063	2,541	2,795	2,756	2,765
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	1,905	2,070	2,146	2,303	2,448
Western Isles Health Board	358	391	467	495	479
Community Services Unit	163	186	181	196	227
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals NHS Trust	1,693	2,190	2,534	2,941	3,210
Shetland Hospitals and Community Services Unit	316	314	343	477	433
Other[1]	2,739	2,524	1,287	549	211
Total	101,070	107,374	118,229	136,068	145,013

[1] Includes closed hospitals, discontinued specialities within hospitals, various convalescent nursing homes etc.

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each trust in Scotland for each of the last five years the number of patients who were readmitted to hospital within three months of discharge. [39204]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is laid out in the table. The reason for a patient being readmitted to hospital is not necessarily related to the reason for original admission. The longer after discharge that a patient is readmitted, the less likely it is that the reasons are related.

Total readmissions within three months of discharge

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	12,645	13,437	14,333	14,723	15,267
Angus NHS Trust	2,003	1,853	1,950	2,341	2,560
Argyll and Bute Unit	1,653	1,796	1,900	2,201	2,135
Ayrshire and Arran Community Care NHS Trust	1,708	1,526	504	495	547
Borders Community Health Services	483	447	336	435	473
Borders General Hospital Acute Unit	2,343	2,532	3,084	3,339	3,645
Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust	744	741	1,062	1,063	1,258
Community and Priority Services Unit	348	400	444	423	415
Community Services Unit	465	500	493	522	528
Continuing Care for the Elderly Unit	4,143	2,696	1,330	216	161
Dumbarton Unit	1,604	1,832	2,289	2,438	2,838
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals NHS Trust	3,715	4,132	4,682	5,273	5,715
Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust	595	709	667	580	673
Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	9,802	10,396	10,510	11,880	13,043
East and Midlothian NHS Trust	2,302	2,226	2,905	3,183	3,418
Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust	831	619	208	248	270
Edinburgh Sick Children's NHS Trust	2,074	2,340	2,613	2,776	2,828
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	4,097	4,441	4,450	4,613	4,719
Fife Healthcare NHS Trust	2,353	2,825	3,097	2,194	1,145
Glasgow Royal Infirmary University NHS Trust	11,726	12,873	13,502	15,144	15,780
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust	3,178	2,799	3,064	3,175	3,284
Hairmyres and Stonehouse hospitals NHS Trust	5,064	5,546	6,512	8,238	8,623
Inverclyde Royal NHS Trust	3,302	3,443	3,738	3,883	4,127
Highland Communities NHS Trust	951	985	1,153	1,290	1,520
Kirkcaldy Acute hospitals NHS Trust	4,504	5,127	5,760	5,350	6,228
Law Hospital NHS Trust	4,758	5,604	5,621	6,153	6,917
Monklands and Bellshill hospitals NHS Trust	5,230	5,604	5,933	6,443	6,604
Moray Health Services NHS Trust	1,152	1,209	1,187	1,295	1,749
North Ayrshire and Arran NHS Trust	5,010	5,709	6,234	8,298	8,158
Orkney Health Board	355	453	439	426	500
Others	5,194	5,200	2,786	1,232	410
Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust	2,712	2,948	3,325	3,858	4,110
Queen margaret Hospital NHS Trust	15	10	32	2,619	4,436
Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust	4,455	4,773	5,304	5,472	5,998
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust	283	334	356	320	344
Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	4,160	5,110	5,780	6,945	6,648
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust	12,982	12,582	13,792	15,017	16,769
Shetland Hospitals and Community Services Unit	620	627	687	768	771
South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust	2,235	2,897	6,466	7,140	7,401
Southern General Hospitals NHS Trust	5,808	5,491	6,275	7,232	8,399
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	4,255	5,114	5,619	5,724	5,614
Stobhill NHS Trust	7,788	7,585	8,350	9,363	9,539
The Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust	4,536	4,894	6,507	6,972	7,023
The Yorkhill NHS Trust	5,668	5,181	4,854	5,592	6,553
West Glasgow Hospitals University NHS Trust	14,519	14,916	17,011	20,603	20,960
West Lothian NHS Trust	3,565	4,026	5,398	5,830	6,587
Western General Hospitals NHS Trust	8,051	10,609	13,232	16,417	18,030

Total readmissions within three months of discharge

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Western Isles Health Board	782	866	971	999	1,065
Scotland	186,767	197,480	216,745	240,742	255,787

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients in each of the last five years were readmitted to hospital within one month of leaving in each health board area. [39205]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is laid out in the table. The reason for a patient being readmitted is not necessarily related to the issues for original admission. The longer after the discharge that a patient is readmitted, the less likely it is that the reasons are connected.

Readmissions within 28 days of discharge

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Argyll and Clyde	5,404	8,490	7,249	8,279	8,378
Ayrshire and Arran	5,320	5,782	7,222	9,476	9,067
Borders	1,448	1,563	1,745	1,924	2,115
Dumfries and Galloway	2,076	2,376	2,715	3,317	3,437
Fife	4,198	4,888	5,412	5,599	6,336
Forth Valley	4,048	4,667	4,988	5,093	5,251
Grampian	8,907	9,238	9,709	10,113	10,624
Greater Glasgow	32,143	31,201	33,285	39,019	41,112
Highland	3,042	3,071	3,736	3,935	4,573
Lanarkshire	8,451	9,237	10,581	12,884	13,982
Lothian	17,188	19,478	21,958	25,545	28,133
Orkney	176	239	209	228	281
Shetland	316	314	343	477	433
Tayside	7,996	8,439	8,590	9,997	10,812
Western Isles	358	391	487	495	479
Scotland	101,071	107,374	118,229	136,068	145,013

Cycling Accidents (Children)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children received head injuries in cycling accidents in each of the past five years. [38236]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children *(a)* died and *(b)* were injured in cycling accidents in each of the past five years. [38235]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of child cyclists reported to have been killed or injured in road accidents in Scotland is set out in the table.

Child (aged 0–15) cyclists killed or injured in road accidents

Year	Fatalities	Injuries
1991	3	545
1992	7	532
1993	6	462
1994	4	625
1995	3	547

Medical Teaching and Research

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total allocation for 1996–97 in respect of general practice teaching and research in Scotland broken down by medical school. [38605]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table.

Medical school	£
Aberdeen	242,700
Dundee	267,700
Edinburgh	411,700
Glasgow	398,200
Total	1,320,300

Cold Weather Payments

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Bellwin scheme of financial assistance for extreme cold weather will be activated for the Scottish borders; and what factors underlie the delay in activating the scheme. [38477]

Mr. Kynoch: A decision on this will be reached shortly.

Conveyancing

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to update the Conveyancing (Scotland) Act 1874; and if he will make a statement. [38858]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The provisions of the Conveyancing (Scotland) Act 1874 are amended from time to time. Further amendment may be required in the light of the Scottish Law Commission's work on the abolition of the feudal system. The Government are committed to completing the reform of the feudal system and will give careful consideration to further action in this area once the commission's report and recommendations have been received.

Road Signs

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects redundant road signing along the M74–A74 marking road works completed along this stretch of road to be removed. [38632]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The remaining redundant signing along the M74–A74 is due to be removed at the completion of the maintenance period at the end of October 1996.

Highlands and Islands

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of objective 1 supported projects in each local enterprise company area within the highlands and islands and the value to date of the projects which have been approved. [38305]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested appears in the table.

LEC	Number of ESF/ERDF projects	Total European Social Fund and European regional development fund approved (£ million)
Argyll and the Islands	98	10.2
Moray Badenoch and Strathspey	49	4.3
Caithness and Sutherland	65	7.5
Inverness and Nairn	25	4.9
Lochaber	43	7.9
Orkney	48	3.4
Ross and Cromarty	37	6.9
Shetland	93	6.2
Skye and Lochalsh	43	3.4
Western Isles	91	19.7
Pan Highlands and Islands	277	28.2

The pan-highlands and islands category includes all projects which cover two or more LEC areas. Information is given about the value of European social fund and European regional development fund grants approved because firm information on total project value becomes available only when project claims are submitted.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many projects approved before 1 March by the project programme management committee of the highlands and islands partnership programme have not yet been started; and if he will make a statement. [38306]

Mr. Forsyth: Eight hundred European regional development fund and European social fund projects had been approved by the Secretary of State before 1 March 1996. One hundred have not submitted claims. However, in some cases where claims have been submitted the claim may be for preparatory work, such as professional fees, rather than for physical work on the project; and in some cases where no claim has yet been submitted the project may have started.

The precise information which the hon. Member seeks is in the process of being collected from project sponsors, in order to assist the management of the programme. It is expected to be available in the autumn; and I shall write to the hon. Member when it has been received.

English Certificates or Money Provisions

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 8 July, *Official Report*, column *53*, about mechanisms in place at the Books of Council and Session, what is his definition of an appropriate court. [38795]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Schedule 8, rule 3 of the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1982 defines the court(s) with jurisdiction to hear a case. Once judgment has been made or entered in that court, that court is the appropriate court to issue the certificate of judgment in terms of section 18(2) of the said Act.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 8 July, *Official Report*, column *54*, about numbers of English certificates of money provisions registered with the Books of Council and Session, for each year 1990 to 1995 and for the first six months of 1996, how many of the certificates were granted in actions which arose out of consumer contracts falling within the terms of schedule 8, rule 3 of the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1982. [38796]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The form of the certificate of judgment is provided for in schedule 6, rule 4 and schedule 7, rule 4 of the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1982. In neither case is it necessary for the certificate to state the cause of the action. The information requested cannot, therefore, be provided from the face of the register and the Keeper has neither the locus nor the means to look behind the ex facie terms of a certificate presented for registration.

Information Technology

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 17 July, *Official Report*, column *589*, concerning information technology functions, if he will give itemised costs of individual projects exceeding £500,000 during the period 1991–92 to 1996–97; and what assessments he has made of the benefits to the NHS in Scotland of each of these individual projects. [38888]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Agency Printing Costs

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the agencies for which his Department is responsible indicating for each the costs incurred for printing *(a)* all publications and *(b)* the annual report in the last available year. [38669]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is given in the table. All costs are based on outturns for 1995–96.

Cost of printing publications 1995–96

Agency	Cost of printing	
	All publications[1] £	Annual report £
Scottish Prison Service	10,064	6,000
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	21,341	7,228
Historic Scotland	[2]479,316	9,753
Scottish Agricultural Science Agency	18,491	5,585
Scottish Office Pensions Agency	[3]59,190	5,721
Student Awards Agency for Scotland	[4]121,896	4,032
Registers of Scotland	55,443	17,398
Scottish Record Office	6,000	2,007
Scottish Court Service	[5]6,399	[4]n/a

[1] Includes the cost of the annual report.
[2] Includes the cost of printing guidebooks, events programmes, promotional leaflets, etc.
[3] Includes the cost of information booklets.
[4] Includes scheme literature and forms.
[5] The Scottish Court Service became an agency on 1 April 1995 and therefore the cost of the first report (1995–96) will be incurred in 1996–97.

Licences

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the licences issued by his Department; for what purpose they are issued; and what are the administrative costs for each. [38677]

Mr. Kynoch: The Scottish Office is responsible for administering the following two licensing arrangements:

The registration of residential schools providing care. This is a statutory requirement which acts as an effective control over proprietors and managers of establishments providing a significant degree of care to young and/or vulnerable children.

Yearly approval of adoption societies. This is a statutory requirement for adoption societies to be approved by the Secretary of State on a yearly basis.

The administration of these licences represents only a small part of the overall administrative responsibilities of the departmental staff involved. It is therefore not possible to assign a specific cost to these particular activities.

Community Service Orders

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the additional costs likely to be incurred by social work departments in Scotland from implementation of the proposals for an increase in the number of hours for which community service orders are to be made contained in the White Paper "Crime and Punishment". [38754]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Community service is 100 per cent. funded by central Government. No net increase in costs is anticipated following from the increases in minimum and maximum hours. Any increase in costs resulting from the increase in maximum hours under solemn procedure is estimated to be offset by a reduction in the number of short orders which are relatively more expensive to manage.

CSC Computing Contract

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland who specified the computing contract won by CSC; and who evaluated the CSC bid. [39174]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A statement of service requirements was prepared by each customer and formed the basis of the contract negotiated with each of the shortlisted bidders. The bid was evaluated by an evaluation group appointed by the national working group on computer services which was representative of customer interests. Customer preferences were sought and taken into account in the evaluation process.

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the disaster recovery plan if CSC fails to discharge its obligations in accordance with its computing contract. [39162]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In the normal course, contingency plans are prepared against events which might cause major disruption to the service. Provisions against the possibility of either party failing to discharge their obligations are included in the contract and these are intended to provide a framework to ensure, as necessary, transfer and continuity of service. A high-level contingency plan based on these contract provisions is in hand and this addresses the range of issues which might arise, options for action and the responsibilities for taking them forward.

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what effect the performance of CSC has had on the billing of general practitioner fundholders by national health service trusts. [39160]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No significant difficulties have arisen. Only one minor difficulty has been brought to the attention of the Common Services Agency and this has been addressed by CSC with the client concerned.

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which targets and deadlines were included in the computing contract won by CSC; and what progress has been made in meeting them. [39159]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Targets for quality and delivery are set, as necessary, by each customer of the contract. These cover the full range of services and developments identified by health boards, NHS trusts and the Common Services Agency and are specified in individual customer agreements. Monitoring is carried out by individual customers on the basis of service reports provided to them by CSC. Responsibility for providing an overview of the contract rests with the Common Services Agency.

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what sanctions are available if CSC fails to discharge its obligations in accordance with its computing contract. [39161]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: If services are not supplied in accordance with service levels specified in customer agreements each customers is entitled to liquidate damages which reflect the loss to the customer. In addition, each customer is entitled to insist on compliance with the service levels specifications regardless of the impact on the resource required by the supplier. If the service falls below the agreed minimum services standard, each customer has additional rights which may include termination if the defaults are not remedied within the three months of notice being given.

Private Landed Estates

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what are the criteria for monitoring non-agricultural grants made to owners of landed estates of more than 500 acres to *(a)* improve or maintain private buildings, *(b)* improve or maintain private roads and *(c)* promote tourism; and if he will make a statement; [39168]

(2) how much public money in *(a)* grants and *(b)* loans has been given to owners of landed estates of more than 500 acres to (i) improve or maintain private buildings or (ii) improve or maintain private roads on those estates in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [39169]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Grants for such purposes may be available from a range of public bodies and agencies in addition to the Scottish Office, and there will be different monitoring criteria for each scheme. Not all this information is held centrally, nor can it be obtained, except at disproportionate cost.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 15 July, *Official Report*, column *407*, if he will set out the methods for monitoring non-agricultural grants to owners of landed estates of more than 500 acres; and if he will make a statement. [39166]

Mr. Robertson: The methods employed do not discriminate as between owners of landed estates and other applicants and include, as appropriate, checking of plans and costings, examination of invoices, physical inspection of completion and supervision of usage for approved purpose and of compliance with conditions.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 15 July, *Official Report*, column *407*, when the information relating to the criteria upon which monitoring conditions imposed on applicants for financial assistance are based will be published; if he will give details of those criteria; and if he will make a statement. [39167]

Mr. Robertson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend to the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) on 21 February, *Official Report*, column *194*. Making such information available is an on-going process and I shall be pleased to send the hon. Member copies of the explanatory literature for any of the schemes administered by the Scottish Office in which she is interested.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer from the Minister with responsibility for education, housing and fisheries of 15 July, *Official Report*, column *407*, in each year since 1990 (i) how many departmental officials were involved in the monitoring of grants of public money to *(a)* agricultural and *(b)* non-agricultural schemes, (ii) how many schemes were found not to have met the requirement conditions, (iii) how much in assistance was recovered, (iv) in how many cases the monitoring of the schemes involved on-site visits and (v) what methods were adopted by departmental officials in monitoring the effectiveness of scheme; and if he will make a statement. [39171]

Mr. Robertson: The information sought in categories (i) to (iv) is not held centrally and could not be obtained except at disproportionate cost. The methods adopted in monitoring effectiveness vary from scheme to scheme, but include such procedures as physical inspection of completed works and regular supervision to check that the grant-aided work continues to meet all the conditions of approval imposed.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated annual saving to private business and public funds form the Deregulation (Gaming on Sunday in Scotland) Order 1996. [39156]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None. The order removes the restriction on licensed casinos and bingo clubs in Scotland opening on Sunday afternoons. The extension of the permitted gaming hours is likely to result in a financial benefit to the industry in the form of an increase in turnover.

Electricity Interconnector

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce his decision on the report of the public inquiry into the proposed electricity interconnector to Northern Ireland. [38973]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend is still considering the report on the public inquiry into proposals to construct the Scottish section of the proposed Scotland-Northern Ireland electricity interconnector and representations on these proposals. He will announce his decision in due course.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the need for a public inquiry into the undersea section of the electricity interconnector to Northern Ireland; what is the outcome of his consideration of these representations; and if he will make a statement. [38975]

Mr. Kynoch: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave the hon. Member on 19 January, *Official Report*, column *804*.

School Language Assistants

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many local education authorities have withdrawn foreign language assistants from secondary schools on grounds of financial constraints. [39115]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Twelve Scottish local authorities have decided to not employ foreign language assistants for their schools for 1996–97. The reasons for this are entirely a matter for the authorities concerned.

Drugs Offences

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women convicted by courts of drug offences in Scotland during 1995. [39221]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested for 1995 is not yet available. The information for 1994 can be found in tables 6(a) and 6(b) of the Scottish Office statistical bulletin "Criminal Proceedings in Scottish Courts, 1994", a copy of which was placed in the House of Commons Library.

Northern Isles Freight

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he plans to respond to the Scottish Affairs Committee report into the removal of tariff rebate subsidy on northern isles freight. [39634]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government welcomed the Committee's study of this subject and has considered the report very carefully. A command paper responding in full to the report will be presented to Parliament after the recess. We fully recognise, however, the importance of this issue to the island communities of Orkney and Shetland; and therefore wish to indicate now the nature of the Government's response on the key recommendations made by the Select Committee.

We welcome the Select Committee's acceptance of the Government's conclusion that the tariff rebate subside scheme was flawed and that there was a need therefore to consider other forms of subsidy. We also welcome its

endorsement of the importance that the Government attach to the current competitive tendering exercise for a lifeline passenger service in the northern isles. We note that it has not argued that the reintroduction of subsidies for the carriage of general freight has a place in a satisfactory long-term regime. These conclusions correspond closely to the Government's analysis of the position.

I promised, following the decision to withdraw freight subsidies, that we would ensure that the effect of withdrawal was monitored and reviewed. We have done so by listening to representations made to us and considering evidence put before us. In response to that and to the Select Committee's report, the Government propose to make four changes to policy. These are:

i. to specify maximum freight rate levels in the lifeline service contract, which will provide some element of price stability to the freight market and ensure that tariffs do not increase excessively.

ii. to require the successful bidder for the lifeline service contract to provide sufficient capacity to carry livestock during peak periods, which will for the first time guarantee that farmers will be able to export livestock during the busiest periods of the year.

iii. to increase the subsidy level for the carriage of livestock from 33 per cent. to 50 per cent. with effect from 1 September 1996 to reflect the economic importance of the livestock trade, particularly to Orkney, and to alleviate the effects of the uncertainty which the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis has introduced into the livestock market since the Government's original decisions. The need for the increased rate of subsidy will be kept under review, in the light of conditions in the livestock market.

iv. to reinstate tariff rebate subsidy support for bulk freight in the northern isles with effect from 1 September 1996, at a rate of 30 per cent. on exports and 10 per cent. on imports, in order to remove the adverse effect of the withdrawal of subsidies on bulk freight on companies exporting low-value bulk freight and on companies dependent on imported supplies of bulk freight. The Scottish Office will also undertake an urgent review of the bulk freight market, which will involve extensive consultations with the relevant local interests, in order to identify a more satisfactory system of bulk freight subsidies for introduction in the medium term. We are suspending the phasing out of tariff rebate subsidy in the Western Isles pending the conclusions of the review; and subsidy will continue at the present rate of 20 per cent. for both imports and exports during 1997–98.

In addition, we are able to give two assurances which the Select Committee sought. These are to confirm that:

the tendering process for the lifeline service enables bidders to present alternative options to the present pattern of service; and

there is no obstacle, in principle, to the successful bidder for the contract applying, through a public sector sponsor, for European regional development fund assistance towards vessel replacement.

The inclusion of peak period livestock capacity within the contract for the lifeline passenger service, which will carry accompanied cars and freight as well as passengers, means that the contract will cover all of the categories of traffic which the Select Committee recommended should be included within the definition of a lifeline service, although the Government remain of the view that the lifeline service is properly defined by reference to the need for passenger ferry services.

The Government have been unable to accept some of the Select Committee's recommendations. We have been unable to reconcile several of the conclusions of the Select Committee with the need for a tendered contract for the lifeline services, which the Select Committee has endorsed, and with the Government's wish to respond urgently to the Select Committee's criticism of the present regime, by putting the tendered contract in place as soon as possible. The Select Committee's recommendation that tariff rebate subsidy be reintroduced for general freight on a temporary basis, despite its conclusion that there is no medium-term need of subsidy for such freight, would have a detrimental impact on the tendering of the lifeline services passenger ferry contract. The Committee's recommendation that the Kirkwall—Invergordon route should be separately tendered to carry freight and livestock would also have a detrimental effect on the tendering of the lifeline contract, and would place other freight carriers operating in the locality at a commercial disadvantage.

The likely adverse impact on the tendering exercise for the lifeline passenger service is also part of the reason that the Government do not accept the recommendation that CalMac be involved in the provision of services in the northern isles. Other important considerations are that it would constitute an unacceptable transfer of risk to the public sector; and would entail very substantial increased costs to the taxpayer to finance vessel procurement.

We regard the Select Committee's proposal for separate public sector procurement of vessels as unnecessary, in the light of the assurance given about eligibility of vessel replacement by private sector operators for European regional development fund assistance; and the proposal is also subject to some disadvantages.

In reaching these decisions, the Government's overriding objective remains to secure an unprecedented long-term guarantee to ensure the continuation of lifeline services to Orkney and Shetland, which are essential to the economic and social welfare of the islands, through a competitive tendering process which should command confidence that the subsidy level does not provide scope for cross-subsidy of freight operations. The additional measures announced today seek to provide help to four key sectors of the economy of the islands:

the livestock farming community, which will benefit from the guaranteed provision within the lifeline contract of capacity to carry livestock during the peak periods and the increase in the rate of tariff rebate subsidy on livestock while the serious difficulties in the livestock market caused by the BSE crisis remain;

companies dealing in general freight, which will benefit from the specification of maximum freight levels in the lifeline contract;

companies dealing in bulk freight, which will benefit from the reintroduction of tariff rebate subsidy and the commitment to an improved system of bulk freight subsidy in the medium term;

consumers in the islands, who will benefit from the effect on prices of the measures on general freight and imported bulk freight.

The Select Committee has rightly made the point that the purpose of subsidy arrangements is not to benefit the

operators of shipping services. Nevertheless, these measures should have a beneficial effect on the volume of business in the market and thus indirectly improve trading conditions for all operators. I believe that the overall effect of the measures set out above will be a significant further economic and social benefit to Scotland's islands communities.

Inward Investment

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the 10 largest industrial or commercial developments in Scotland which resulted from inward investment since 1993; and, in each case, what estimate he has made of the number of jobs created and the average cost to public funds of each of these jobs. [37636]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* All our dealings with inward investors are undertaken on a commercially confidential basis and we do not therefore publish details of individual projects except in cases where details of the project have been announced by the company itself. The table contains details of the 10 largest inward investment projects—in terms of planned new jobs—which have been attracted to Scotland since 1 January 1993 and which have been the subject of public announcements:

Date of announcement	*Company*	*Location*	*Type of project*	*Planned investment (£ million)*	*Published figures for: Planned new jobs*	*RSA (£ million)*
April 1994	International Components Corporation	East Kilbride	New Project	6.0	400	2.05
September 1994	NEC Semiconductors (UK) Ltd.	Livingston	Expansion	530.0	430	7.0
October 1994	British Sky Broadcasting	Dunfermline	New project	10.0	1,000	6.0
February 1995	Meric International Corporation	Irvine	New project	8.0	450	3.4
August 1995	British Gas	Edinburgh	New project	[1]—	500	Nil
August 1995	Motorola	Bathgate	Expansion	[1]—	400	7.0
September 1995	TSB	Glasgow	New project	15.0	900	[2]—
October 1995	Lexmark International	Rosyth	New project	26.0	500	[2]—
November 1995	Chunghwa Picture Tubes Ltd.	Mossend	New project	260.0	3,300	[2]—
July 1996	Lite-On Technology	Mossend	New project	40.0	1,031	[2]—

[1] Not published by company.
[2] Not yet published.

Details of the financial assistance offered to inward investors are commercially confidential. All such assistance complies with the rules of the relevant schemes and with EC state aid rules. The principal form of assistance offered in support of inward investment projects is regional selective assistance and where the amount offered is £75,000 or more, the total amount offered is published in "Labour Market Trends" in the quarter after the first instalment of grant is paid. Where such publication has already taken place, the relevant figure is included in the table.

Most of the above projects are still in the process of being implemented and up-to-date information on the number of new jobs so far created by them is not held centrally.

Atholl Estate

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what sums from public funds have been given to the Atholl estate in the form of *(a)* non-agricultural grants and *(b)* loans since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [36735]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 11 July 1996]:* Fully comprehensive information is not held centrally and some information may be commercially sensitive. However, three important areas of support to the estate have come from the Forestry Commission, Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland. In the case of SNH and Historic Scotland, full information on grant payments is published in their annual reports and is thus available to those who are interested.

Rowett Research Institute

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the prior option review of the Rowett research institute. [39665]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Government's response to the report of the multidepartmental efficiency scrutiny of public sector research establishments announced a series of prior option reviews. As part of this series the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department will conduct a prior options review of the Rowett research institute.

The review will address whether the research conducted at the Rowett continues to be needed, whether it requires public funding, the relationship of the Rowett to others working in similar or related areas of science, and the potential for privatisation or rationalisation.

I would welcome comments from interested parties. They should be sent by 30 September to:

Mrs. B. McGee
The Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department
Pentland House
47 Robb's Loan
EDINBURGH
EH14 1TY

Forestry Commission Land Sales

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those areas in the Scottish borders area sold by the Forestry Commission in 1996. [37995]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. Gordon Cowie, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Gordon M. Cowie to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Scotland has asked me to reply to your Question about the areas sold by the Forestry Commission, in 1996, in the Scottish Borders Area.

There have been no plantation sales completed, in the Borders Council Area, so far in 1996.

However, there is one plantation, Priesthaugh measuring 787 ha, currently with our Solicitors awaiting legal completion and another, Edgarhope measuring 143.5 ha, with Agents for marketing.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what tonnage of fishing vessels and what number of fishing vessels in Scotland have been *(a)* permanently reassigned for purposes other than fishing in the waters of the European Community and *(b)* permanently transferred to a third country since 1993; how many of these would have been covered under article 8 of European Council regulations 3699/93; and if he will make a statement. [38243]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 19 July 1996]:* No record is kept of the destination of vessels leaving the fleet without Government assistance. Under the Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning) Schemes 1993 to 1996, no decommissioned vessels were either permanently reassigned for purposes other than fishing in the waters of the European Community or permanently transferred to a third country.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning the option of including permanent transfer of a fishing vessel to a third country or permanent reassignment for purposes other than fishing in waters of the European Community in the United Kingdom's decommissioning scheme; and if he will make a statement. [38244]

Mr. Robertson *[holding answer 19 July 1996]:* A number of organisations made representations to the Scottish Office about fishing vessel decommissioning in response to a consultation document issued on 14 March. Some of these included support for the disposal of decommissioned vessels by methods other than scrapping. Similar representations were also received about previous schemes.

Under Council regulation (EEC) No. 3699/93, each member state is responsible for ensuring that vessels decommissioned with assistance from the Community's financial instrument of fisheries guidance do not re-enter its own fishing fleet or the fleet of any other member state. It has not been possible to develop transfer or reassignment mechanisms in the UK which would guarantee this. Under the Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning) Scheme 1996, the requirement therefore remains that most decommissioned vessels in the UK be scrapped, although there is a provision allowing vessels to be transferred in a seaworthy state to registered museums.

TREASURY

Unfunded Pension Liabilities

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated impact on the public sector unfunded pension liability of the recent proposals from each of the public sector pay review bodies. [36350]

Mr. Jack: Recent proposals from review bodies have not contained this information. The Government Actuary's Department periodically reassesses the accrued unfunded pensions liabilities of public service schemes taking account of movements in pay, other economic variables and changes in demographic features. However, these liabilities cannot readily be broken down according to review body.

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a ready reckoner of the change in unfunded pension liabilities caused by salary changes in $\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. increments between $\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. and 10 per cent. on the basis of current levels of inflation and discount rates. [36340]

Mr. Jack: Each 1 per cent. rise in pay above the level of price inflation is estimated to increase the cash equivalent transfer value of unfunded pension liabilities in public service pension schemes by about £700 million. These additional liabilities will become payable over a lengthy period reflecting particularly the span of years over which existing staff reach retirement age and the period of years over which their pensions are payable.

Isle of Wight (Expenditure)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total annual expenditure of his Department in respect of the Isle of Wight, including expenditure on administration. [36918]

Mr. Waldegrave: Information is not held centrally about how much Government expenditure is for the benefit of particular counties. However, a regional breakdown is available in "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses", Cm3201. Information could be collected from other Government Departments only at disproportionate cost.

Abortion Statistics

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors account for the interval in publication between the next edition of "Abortion Statistics, England and Wales" (series AB No. 19) and its predecessors. [36899]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The edition "1992 Abortion Statistics, England and Wales (series AB No. 19)" was published on 30 March 1995. The Office for National Statistics publishes on average, one edition a year. The present target dates for each edition are 12 to 18 months from the end of the period covered. Publication dates are determined by the time required for the receipt of HSA4 notification forms by the chief medical officers at the

Department of Health and the Welsh Office, and the statistical processing and analyses of the notifications by the ONS in preparation for their subsequent publication.

The key principle of ONS policy on the release of statistical data is that data are released as early as possible.

Housing Benefit Cheques

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will act to limit the commission charged by organisations that cash housing benefit cheques for claimants. [37172]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Housing benefit claimants do not need to use cheque encashment centres. Local authorities—who are responsible for the payment of this benefit—have powers to make alternative arrangements to ensure that claimants who do not have bank accounts receive its full value. For example, payment can be made by Girocheque which can be cashed at a post office; local authorities can use their own cash offices to cash cheques; or benefit can be paid direct to the landlord.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the procedures for cashing cheques by organisations which are not banks. [37170]

Mrs. Knight: These are matters for the cheque cashing centres and the banks who offer them cheque clearing facilities.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will investigate organisations which cash cheques for housing benefit claimants and make recommendations to tackle fraud and abuses. [37171]

Mrs. Knight: Local authorities are responsible for the payment of housing benefits. Those which are concerned about organisations which cash cheques for housing benefit claimants have powers to make alternative arrangements to ensure that claimants without bank accounts receive the full value of their benefit by other means. For example, payment can be made by Girocheque which can be cashed at a post office; local authorities can use their own cash offices to cash cheques; or benefits can be paid direct to the landlord.

The clearing bank which offers facilities to a cheque cashing firm is liable should any problems occur with a cheque not paid directly to the named payee.

Income Tax

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the revenue from the higher rates of income tax in *(a)* 1978–79, *(b)* 1983–84 and *(c)* 1995–96; [37579]

(2) what proportion of gross national product was raised in higher rate income tax in *(a)* 1978–79, *(b)* 1983–84 and *(c)* 1995–96; [37584]

(3) what proportion of income tax was raised by higher rate tax in *(a)* 1978–79, *(b)* 1983–84 and *(c)* 1995–96. [37583]

Mr. Jack: Estimated income tax liabilities from higher rates of income tax, that is rates in excess of the basic rate, and from the investment income surcharge are given in the table. Their sum is also expressed as a percentage of total income tax and of gross national product at market prices.

	Income tax at excess over basic rate (1) £ million	*Investment income surcharge (2) £ million*	*(1) and (2) as percentage of total income tax*	*(1) and (2) as percentage of GNP*
1978–79	1,790	249	10.1	1.2
1983–84	3,330	255	10.2	1.2
1995–96[1]	7,080	—	9.8	1.0

[1] Provisional.

Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Walden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of his policies in respect of reducing public expenditure and taxation levels on the timing of priority infrastructure projects, with particular reference to bypasses. [38440]

Mr. Waldegrave: When deciding on its future spending plans in the annual public expenditure survey round, the Government consider their priorities for all areas of departmental expenditure. The implication of any options is under discussion for future levels of infrastructure funding, including the roads programme, is an important element of these deliberations.

Tobacco Smuggling

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he has taken to combat organised criminal gangs smuggling tobacco; and if he will make a statement. [38808]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Customs have taken further steps this year to combat organised smuggling of tobacco and other revenue goods. These include a programme of enhanced staff training, an uprating of intelligence systems and organisation, and an increase in staffing levels. Whilst measures of this kind by their nature take some time to bear fruit, the Government are determined that vigorous efforts to protect both the revenue and legitimate traders will continue.

Self-assessment

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will ensure that small firms will not suffer financially as a result of the introduction of self-assessment taxation. [38904]

Mr. Jack: Self-assessment is a clearer, more straightforward, more efficient tax administration system which will reduce costs for the self-employed.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of tax returns completed by volunteers in the pilot self-assessment of taxation scheme were filled in *(a)* correctly, *(b)* incorrectly and *(c)* on time. [38894]

Mr. Jack: Results from the first year's live trial of self-assessment in Leicester show that 95 per cent. of tax returns could be processed without further reference to the taxpayer. Of these, 37 per cent. required the Revenue to make a correction of an obvious error in the return. A total of 79 per cent. of tax returns were submitted to the Inland Revenue within the time allowed under

self-assessment. Revised forms reflecting comments by the Leicester volunteers, are currently being used in the extended live trial in Leicester and Southampton.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the extra costs to small firms of paying accountants to prepare accounts for random inspection by the Inland Revenue. [38893]

Mr. Jack: In order to monitor the operation of self-assessment and enhance compliance, the Inland Revenue will carry out a small number of random inquiries into returns under the self-assessment taxation system. As all necessary information will be included in the self-assessment return form, small firms will not be required to prepare accounts for self-assessment.

Value Added Tax

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to ensure that VAT penalties are levied on small businesses only where there is not a reasonable excuse for late or incorrect payments. [38900]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The VAT civil penalties for late or incomplete payment and for inaccurate returns are default surcharge and misdeclaration penalty respectively. Existing legislation provides that neither penalty is imposed where a business, of whatever size, has a reasonable excuse. Insufficiency funds, reliance on a third party or dilatoriness or inaccuracy on the part of any person relied upon are specifically excluded by law from qualifying as a reasonable excuse. However the cash accounting threshold of £350,000 whereby many small businesses pay VAT only when it is paid to them is of considerable benefit to small businesses.

Debt Interest Payments

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of general Government expenditure was spent on debt interest payments in each year since 1990; and what he expects it to be in 1996–97 and 1997–98. [38701]

Mr. Waldegrave: As a percentage of general Government expenditure (GGE(X)—GGE net of interest and divided receipts, excluding privatisation proceeds and lottery financed spending—general Government net debt interest payments were as follows:

	Percentage
1990–91	5.6
1991–92	4.7
1992–93	4.8
1993–94	5.3
1994–95	6.1
1995–96	6.7

For 1996–97 and 1997–98, general Government net debt interest as a percentage of GGE(X) is forecast as 7.2 per cent. and 7.8 per cent. respectively. These forecasts are consistent with the summer economic forecast 1996.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the level of Government expenditure on debt interest payment in each year since 1990; and what he expects it to be in 1996–97 and 1997–98. [38700]

Mr. Waldegrave: General Government net debt interest payments were as follows:

1990–91: £12.1 billion
1991–92: £11.3 billion
1992–93: £12.7 billion
1993–94: £14.6 billion
1994–95: £17.5 billion
1995–96: £20.2 billion

For 1996–97 and 1997–98, general Government net debt interest is forecast at £22.2 billion and £24.8 billion respectively. These forecasts are consistent with the summer economic forecast 1996.

Financial Services Act

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) of 27 June, *Official Report*, column *235*, if he will list the number and nature of relevant representatives that were consulted, the basis of their selection, and the criteria of relevance. [38906]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Law Commission's report (No. 236) on fiduciary duties and regulatory rules was published in December 1985. This provided an opportunity for interested participants within the financial services industry to consider the implications of the recommendation that legislation would be desirable to clarify the effect of Chinese wall arrangements.

The Treasury received no representations supporting the Law Commissions' recommendations. Moreover, both the Securities and Investments Board and the London Investment Bank Association did express the view that there was no compelling reasons to amend the Financial Services Act 1986 as recommended by the Law Commission, and much to be gained from relying on the legal precedents set since the Financial Services Act came into force.

Population Statistics

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the *(a)* male, *(b)* female and *(c)* total population was under the age of 25 years, broken down by age group and in total, for each of the last 20 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in each year. [38683]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information is contained in the following table:

Estimated resident population at mid-year 1974–1994: selected age-groups expressed as a percentage of the total

England and Wales

	Percentage of males aged							
Year	*0–4*	*5–9*	*10–14*	*15–19*	*20–24*	*Total*	*0–24*	*25+*
1974	7.6	8.6	8.4	7.4	7.2	100	39.3	60.7
1975	7.3	8.4	8.6	7.6	7.1	100	39.0	61.0

Estimated resident population at mid-year 1974–1994: selected age-groups expressed as a percentage of the total

England and Wales

	Percentage of males aged							
Year	*0–4*	*5–9*	*10–14*	*15–19*	*20–24*	*Total*	*0–24*	*25+*
1976	6.9	8.3	8.7	7.8	7.2	100	38.8	61.2
1977	6.5	8.1	8.7	8.0	7.3	100	38.6	61.4
1978	6.3	7.9	8.7	8.2	7.4	100	38.4	61.6
1979	6.2	7.5	8.6	8.5	7.5	100	38.3	61.7
1980	6.3	7.2	8.4	8.7	7.6	100	38.2	61.8
1981	6.4	6.8	8.3	8.8	7.8	100	38.0	62.0
1982	6.5	6.5	8.1	8.8	8.0	100	37.9	62.1
1983	6.6	6.2	7.8	8.8	8.2	100	37.7	62.3
1984	6.6	6.2	7.5	8.6	8.5	100	37.4	62.6
1985	6.6	6.2	7.2	8.4	8.7	100	37.1	62.9
1986	6.7	6.4	6.8	8.2	8.8	100	36.8	63.2
1987	6.7	6.5	6.4	8.0	8.8	100	36.4	63.6
1988	6.8	6.6	6.2	7.8	8.7	100	36.0	64.0
1989	6.9	6.6	6.2	7.4	8.5	100	35.6	64.4
1990	7.0	6.6	6.2	7.1	8.3	100	35.2	64.8
1991	7.0	6.6	6.3	6.7	8.1	100	34.8	65.2
1992	7.1	6.7	6.4	6.4	7.9	100	34.4	65.6
1993	7.0	6.8	6.5	6.1	7.7	100	34.0	66.0
1994	6.9	6.8	6.5	6.1	7.3	100	33.7	66.3

The question also asked for percentage changes each year. It is not entirely clear what was meant by this, but year to year differences in the percentages can be seen in the tables.

Estimated resident population at mid-year 1974–1994: selected age-groups expressed as a percentage of the total

England and Wales

	Percentage of females aged							
Year	*0–4*	*5–9*	*10–14*	*15–19*	*20–24*	*Total*	*0–24*	*25+*
1974	6.8	7.7	7.6	6.7	6.7	100	35.5	64.5
1975	6.6	7.6	7.7	6.9	6.6	100	35.3	64.7
1976	6.2	7.5	7.8	7.1	6.6	100	35.1	64.9
1977	5.8	7.3	7.8	7.3	6.6	100	34.9	65.1
1978	5.6	7.1	7.8	7.5	6.7	100	34.7	65.3
1979	5.6	6.8	7.7	7.7	6.8	100	34.6	65.4
1980	5.7	6.5	7.5	7.8	7.0	100	34.5	65.5
1981	5.7	6.1	7.4	7.9	7.3	100	34.4	65.6
1982	5.9	5.8	7.2	7.9	7.4	100	34.3	65.7
1983	6.0	5.6	7.0	7.9	7.6	100	34.1	65.9
1984	6.0	5.6	6.7	7.7	7.8	100	33.8	66.2
1985	6.0	5.6	6.4	7.6	8.0	100	33.6	66.4
1986	6.0	5.7	6.1	7.4	8.1	100	33.3	66.7
1987	6.1	5.8	5.8	7.2	8.0	100	33.0	67.0
1988	6.2	6.0	5.6	7.0	7.9	100	32.6	67.4
1989	6.3	6.0	5.5	6.7	7.8	100	32.3	67.7
1990	6.3	6.0	5.6	6.4	7.6	100	31.9	68.1
1991	6.4	6.0	5.7	6.1	7.4	100	31.6	68.4
1992	6.4	6.1	5.8	5.8	7.2	100	31.3	68.7
1993	6.4	6.1	5.9	5.5	7.0	100	31.0	69.0
1994	6.3	6.2	5.9	5.5	6.7	100	30.7	69.3

Estimated resident population at mid-year 1974–1994: selected age-groups expressed as a percentage of the total

England and Wales

	Percentage of persons aged							
Year	*0–4*	*5–9*	*10–14*	*15–19*	*20–24*	*Total*	*0–24*	*25+*
1974	7.2	8.1	8.0	7.0	6.9	100	37.3	62.7
1975	6.9	8.0	8.2	7.2	6.8	100	37.1	62.9
1976	6.5	7.9	8.2	7.4	6.9	100	36.9	63.1
1977	5.2	7.7	8.3	7.7	6.9	100	36.7	63.3
1978	5.9	7.5	8.2	7.9	7.0	100	36.5	63.5
1979	5.9	7.1	8.1	8.1	7.1	100	36.4	63.6
1980	6.0	6.8	7.9	8.2	7.3	100	36.3	63.7
1981	6.1	6.4	7.8	8.3	7.5	100	36.2	63.8
1982	6.2	6.1	7.6	8.4	7.7	100	36.0	64.0
1983	6.3	5.9	7.4	8.3	7.9	100	35.8	64.2
1984	6.3	5.9	7.1	8.2	8.2	100	35.5	64.5
1985	6.3	5.9	6.8	8.0	8.3	100	35.3	64.7
1986	6.4	6.0	6.4	7.8	8.4	100	34.0	65.0
1987	6.4	6.2	6.1	7.6	8.4	100	34.7	65.3

Estimated resident population at mid-year 1974–1994: selected age-groups expressed as a percentage of the total England and Wales

Year	Percentage of persons aged 0–4	5–9	10–14	15–19	20–24	Total	0–24	25+
1988	6.5	6.3	5.9	7.4	8.3	100	33.3	66.7
1989	6.6	6.3	5.8	7.0	8.1	100	33.9	66.1
1990	6.6	6.3	5.9	6.8	7.9	100	33.5	66.5
1991	6.7	6.3	6.0	6.4	7.8	100	33.2	66.8
1992	6.7	6.4	6.1	6.1	7.6	100	32.8	67.2
1993	6.7	6.4	6.2	5.8	7.3	100	32.5	67.5
1994	6.6	6.5	6.2	5.8	7.0	100	32.2	67.8

Alcohol Duty

Mr. Amess: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate of the price elasticity of demand for *(a)* beer, *(b)* wine and *(c)* spirits are currently used to estimate the impact of changes in excise duties on Government revenue; over what period these price elasticities are based; and when they are next to be updated. [38971]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The revenue implications are estimated using a computer model produced by the Institute of Fiscal Studies, with values for independent variables updated annually. The model has a wide range of both own and cross price elasticities for various categories of consumption with own price elasticities of –0.963, –1.048 and –1.07 for beer, wine and spirits respectively.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated annual saving to private business and public funds from the Deregulation (Validity of Civil Preliminaries in Marriage) Order 1996. [39158]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I am advised by the Registrar General that the extension of the period of validity from three to 12 months of the civil preliminaries to marriage will produce no savings for business. Local authorities may accrue some small savings in administration.

Abortion Statistics

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many NHS abortions were performed in *(a)* North Yorkshire, *(b)* Yorkshire, and *(c)* England in each year since 1979. [38925]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The figures following are for women usually resident in *(a)* North Yorkshire district health region, *(b)* Yorkshire health region, and *(c)* England.

Number of NHS abortions performed to usually resident women, 1979–1994

	North Yorkshire	Yorkshire	England
1979	609	2,874	51,785
1980	634	2,970	56,966
1981	722	2,961	57,346
1982	629	2,825	58,714
1983	653	2,716	59,091
1984	692	2,719	61,190
1985	695	2,920	61,350
1986	789	3,252	63,368
1987	775	3,327	65,354
1988	924	3,221	64,885

Number of NHS abortions performed to usually resident women, 1979–1994

	North Yorkshire	Yorkshire	England
1989	896	3,616	66,513
1990	1,002	3,889	69,059
1991	1,035	4,638	70,749
1992	1,059	5,640	87,198
1993	1,117	6,111	94,199
1994	1,235	7,315	100,001

Printing Costs

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the agencies for which he is responsible indicating for each the costs incurred for printing *(a)* all publications and *(b)* the annual report in the last available year. [38671]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executives of the Chancellor's five agencies: National Savings, the Royal Mint, the Office for National Statistics, the Valuation Office and Paymaster agencies. I have asked each of them to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Peter Bareau to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 23 July 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, with details for National Savings, to your Question about printing costs.

The total cost of printing external publications (excluding the annual report) during 1995–96 was approximately £1.8 million. This figure covers principally the costs of our product booklets, investment guides and interest rate leaflet, all of which are available throughout the post office network, and our guide for financial advisers.

The cost of printing the annual report for the year ending 31 March 1996 was just under £14,000.

Letter from Mrs. V. E. Lowe to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 23 July 1996:

In your question to the Chancellor (ref 38671) you ask about the costs incurred in printing publications and the Annual Report.

I have regarded publications as that material available to the public, such as Council Tax leaflets, Charter booklets, Business Plan, Property Market Report etc. The cost during 1995–96 was £95,165 and the cost of producing the last Annual Report and Accounts was £7,918.

Please let me know if I can assist further.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 23 July 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply to your Question requesting the most recent annual costs for printing all publications and in particular the Annual Reports for the agencies for which he is responsible as far as it relates to the Office for National Statistics.

On your first point, most ONS priced paper publications are published by HMSO, who pay for the printing costs. Details of these printing costs can be obtained from the HMSO. For priced paper publications published by ONS, the printing costs in the calendar year 1995 were approximately £24,000.

The printing costs for the last CSO Annual Report and Accounts (1995–96), which was laid before Parliament on the 15 July 1996, were £2964.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Letter from Keith Sullens to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 23 July 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply to your Question seeking information on the costs his Agencies have incurred on printing all publications, and separately the annual report for the last available year.

The total amount spent by PAYMASTER in 1995/96 was £47,932.72. Of this, £14,515.00 was spent on the Annual Report and Accounts.

Letter from Roger Holmes to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 23 July 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply to your Question about printing costs.

In the financial year 1995/96 the Royal Mint incurred costs of £10,437.00 for the design and printing of its Annual Report for 1994/95. There were no other publications printed during this period.

Primary Tax Legislation

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made by the Inland Revenue with the project to rewrite primary tax legislation to make it clearer and more user-friendly. [39620]

Mr. Jack: I am very pleased with the progress that has been made in developing this important project. The Inland Revenue has today published a consultative document which sets out detailed proposals for taking the rewrite forward. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

This is a huge project and we are committed to doing it well. The full and continuing involvement of the private sector will be essential to its success. The document sets out how we propose to achieve that aim.

Petroleum Revenue Tax

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change the petroleum revenue tax legislation in respect of the provision of relief for expenditure not related to an oil field. [39639]

Mr. Jack: The Government intend to introduce legislation in the next Finance Bill to put beyond doubt that oil companies cannot manipulate existing tax rules to allow them to claim petroleum revenue tax relief on non-field expenditure incurred by an unrelated group which continues to hold North sea licence interests. The change will apply to all claims for relief made on or after today. This new legislation will ensure that substantial amounts of PRT are protected.

Further details are given in an Inland Revenue press release which is being issued today.

Alcohol and Tobacco

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes Customs and Excise are proposing to the measurement of cross-border shopping in alcohol and tobacco products; and if he will make a statement on the latest estimates of revenue losses. [39641]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Customs have advised me that their estimate of the extent of legitimate personal imports of alcoholic and tobacco products is now calculated on the basis of data from the international passenger survey. Customs' earlier estimates used data from the omnibus survey. The international passenger survey has a larger sample than omnibus, interviewing travellers during or shortly after their journey. It is therefore considered a more reliable source of data on cross-border shopping. Customs have consulted with representatives of the alcohol and tobacco industries over this change, and have given them all relevant data.

Customs' estimate of total tax revenues—excise duty and VAT—lost from legitimate personal importation of alcohol and tobacco for the calendar year 1995 has been re-calculated on this basis as £210 million for duty paid alcoholic drinks and £80 million for tobacco products, making a total of £290 million. The new figure for alcoholic products is broadly in line with that calculated from omnibus data. As before, these figures use Customs' assumption that 50 per cent. of alcoholic products purchased abroad represent additional consumption.

Cervical Cancer

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the rates of cervical cancer amongst women *(a)* nationally and *(b)* from ethnic minorities for each of the past five years. [37038]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* The table shows (i) death rates for all women per 100,000 women from cervical cancer—ICD[1] 180—in the United Kingdom for the years 1986–1994 and (ii) incidence rates of cervical cancer for all women per 100,000 women in the United Kingdom for the years 1986–1990, the latest five-year period available. Information on ethnic status is not collected.

Per 100,000 women

	Death rates		*Incidence rates*
1986	7.7	1986	17.1
1987	7.3	1987	16.6
1988	7.4	1988	17.2
1989	7.0	1989	15.7
1990	6.7	1990[2]	16.7
1991	6.4		
1992	6.3		
1993	5.7		
1994	5.2		

[1]International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.
[2] Provisional.

The United Kingdom death rates from 1986–1994 are based on deaths registered each year for Scotland and Northern Ireland. The deaths for England and Wales are those registered for 1986 to 1992; but for 1993 and 1994 the deaths are those that occurred in the year.

Taxation

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the *(a)* direct tax and *(b)* indirect tax in cash prices paid in (i) 1978–79 and

(ii) 1996–97 for those whose income is in the (i) top 1 per cent., (ii) top 5 per cent., (iii) top 10 per cent., (iv) top 25 per cent., (vi) bottom 10 per cent., (vii) bottom 5 per cent., and (viii) bottom 1 per cent. and what is the total change for each category and change for each individual taxpayer. [38786]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The information is not available in the form requested. Latest information is contained in the article, "The Effects of Taxes and Benefits on Household Income, 1994–95, (Economic Trends, December 1995).

NORTHERN IRELAND

Race Relations

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultations he had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on the question of *(a)* amending the Race Relations Acts and *(b)* other measures to protect members of the Irish traveller community when in Great Britain. [38292]

Mr. Ancram: I have had no consultations with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on either of these matters. Case law in Great Britain has already established Irish people generally as constituting a racial group and therefore subject to the protection of the Race Relations Act 1976.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the number of *(a)* different ethnic groups and their populations and *(b)* the Irish traveller community, who will be covered by the proposed race relations Order in Council. [38291]

Mr. Ancram: The Government's proposal for a draft race relations (NI) Order in Council seeks to extend to all individuals in Northern Ireland legal redress against racial discrimination. As a question on ethnic origin has not been included in previous Northern Ireland censuses, there are no precise figures on the number in different ethnic groups in Northern Ireland. In its consultation document on race relations of December 1992, the Government published an estimate of approximately 5,000 members of the Chinese community, 1,000 members of the Indian community and 700 members of the Pakistani community. The Irish traveller community was estimated at 1,115 in a survey conducted by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland in 1993.

Student Grants

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will consult the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in order to amend the residency rule that prevents British students whose British-born parents have been abroad, outside the EU, for periods of more than three years from receiving awards for or toward tuition fees, to apply to a period of more than 10 years. [38296]

Mr. Ancram: No. There are no plans to consult about such a change to the residence requirements, which are common throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lindsay Robb

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 3 July, *Official Report*, columns *4777–8*, what payments have been made by the Royal Ulster Constabulary to Mr. Lindsay Robb; and on what dates. [38511]

Sir John Wheeler: It is not appropriate to comment on specific instances in which payments are made under the witness protection scheme. In no circumstances is payment offered as an inducement in return for the giving of evidence. However, it is an unfortunate fact of life, not unique to Northern Ireland, that people who are prepared to perform their public duty in giving evidence of wrongdoing can, on occasion, be subjected to threat and intimidation. In such cases, it is appropriate that protection should be given to those who are prepared to make such a commitment. This protection may include the relocation of the individual and his or her family away from their original home, and involve payments to reimburse them for additional expenses incurred, or to enable them to maintain a standard of living equivalent to that enjoyed prior to any forced relocation.

Death Statistics

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many deaths have been recorded in Northern Ireland for each of the past 10 years in the period December to March; [39010]

(2) what the excess winter mortality rates have been in Northern Ireland for each of the last 10 years expressed in both excess numbers and as percentages. [39011]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for the subject has been delegated to the Statistics and Research Agency under its chief executive, Mr. E. F. Jardine. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. F. Jardine to Mr. Ian Davidson, dated 22 July 1996:

You recently tabled two questions asking the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many deaths have been recorded in Northern Ireland for each of the past 10 years in the period December to March, and what the excess Winter mortality rates have been for each of the last 10 years expressed in both excess numbers and as percentages. I have been asked to reply in my capacity as Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

The information provided in the attached table shows the total number of deaths and the excess winter mortality rates for the period December to March for each of the last 10 years compared against the number of expected deaths for the same period (based on the average for the year). I trust this information is sufficient and if I can be of further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Table showing excess deaths/death rates in winter period December to March

Deaths	*1984–85*	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1989–90*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Total for (December–November)	15,799	16,127	15,286	15,946	15,103	16,123	16,131	15,008	15,472	15,354	15,239
Total for (December–March)	5,772	6,222	5,539	5,896	5,296	6,594	5,773	5,548	5,283	5,635	5,547

Table showing excess deaths/death rates in winter period December to March

Deaths	*1984–85*	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1989–90*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Expected for (December–March)	5,266	5,376	5,095	5,315	5,034	5,374	5,044	5,003	5,157	5,118	5,080
Actual deaths in (December–March)[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Expected deaths in (December–March)	506	846	444	581	262	1,220	729	545	126	517	487
Difference as percentage of expected deaths in (December–March)	9.61	15.74	8.71	10.93	5.20	22.70	14.45	10.89	2.44	10.10	9.19
Actual Death rate (December–March)	11.12	11.91	10.55	11.21	10.04	12.45	10.81	10.28	9.71	10.30	10.09
Expected Death rate (December–March)	10.14	10.29	9.70	10.10	9.54	10.14	9.45	9.27	9.48	9.35	9.24

[1] One third of annual deaths.
[2] Excess deaths in period December to March.

Fair Employment

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the titles of its research papers into fair employment practice that the Northern Ireland civil service has decided not to publish. [38294]

Mr. Ancram: The policy, planning and research unit, on behalf of the central community relations unit, commissioned research on "Modelling Rates of Unemployment using the "Continuous Household Surveys 1987–89" from the department of social statistics at the university of Southampton in December 1990, and a report was received in April 1993. The research was not published as it had been superseded by a more comprehensive project, employing more up-to-date data. Two reports on this latter research, which was commissioned from the Northern Ireland economic research centre, have subsequently been published by the central community relations unit.

Pension Splitting

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the ability of divorcing couples to arrange pension splitting under the Family Law Act 1996 provisions where their pensions are governed by the new England and Wales law, or one is so governed while the other is governed by Northern Ireland law; and if he will make a statement. [38297]

Mr. Moss: None. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security proposes to publish a Green Paper to consult on the implications of pension splitting, and to bring forward firm proposals for its implementation. It is our intention to bring forward legislation to allow for pension splitting to be implemented in Northern Ireland from the same date as in England and Wales.

Stalking

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps in consultation with the Home Office to have Northern Ireland included in the extent of the proposed law on stalking. [38293]

Sir John Wheeler: On 9 July, the Home Office and Lord Chancellor's Departments jointly published a consultation paper, "Stalking—The Solutions", which addresses the problems posed by stalking in England and Wales and proposes measures to deal with the menace. As the consultation paper states, my right hon. and learned Friend intends to publish a separate paper which will address circumstances in Northern Ireland, including the relevant civil and criminal law. The extent of any new legislation which might arise, and the means by which it might be implemented, will obviously depend on comments received on the consultation papers in the two jurisdictions. I will, however, bear the hon. and learned Gentleman's request in mind.

Queen's University Student Union

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the moneys paid to Queen's university students union over the last three years, the purposes of the payments and the religious breakdown of its part-time staff. [38295]

Mr. Ancram: Grants paid by the Queen's university of Belfast to its students union over the three years to 1994–95, the latest figures available, are:

Academic year	*£*
1992–93	683,000
1993–94	731,000
1994–95	757,000

Grants go towards the running costs of the students union, which under the university's charter and statutes promotes the interest of students and represents them in all matters affecting their interests.

The religious breakdown of the part-time locally recruited staff is 16 per cent. Protestant and 84 per cent. Catholic.

Statistical Forms

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the statistical forms issued to businesses by his Department, indicating the number of each sent out. [38675]

Sir John Wheeler: In 1995, the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments conducted or commissioned 86 statistical surveys of businesses. A list of the surveys and the number of forms sent out for each survey is contained in the statistics notice "Statistical

Surveys of Businesses by Central Government in Northern Ireland during 1995", a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Northern Ireland Departments took an early initiative to review the continued need for their forms which impact on business. A register of all Northern Ireland forms sent to business is held which allows the overall position to be kept under review. A detailed review of each NI form is carried out once every two years.

Plastic Bullets

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to whom a citizen of Northern Ireland should complain if they believe that they were injured by a plastic bullet fired improperly by a Royal Ulster Constabulary officer; and what complaints procedure exists for examining such complaints. [38955]

Sir John Wheeler: Plastic bullets are not in use in Northern Ireland.

A complaint about the conduct of a police officer may be made to a variety of places, including a local police station, the independent commission for police complaints, the police authority or through a solicitor, but ultimately will end up with the police in complaints and discipline branch. If, however, the complaint is about an officer of assistant chief constable rank or above, it will fall to the police authority for consideration.

The procedures for examining complaints are contained in the Police (NI) Order 1987—(1987) No. 938 (N.I.10)—and regulations and guidance issued under it. A guide on making a complaint, issued by the independent commission for police complaints, will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many complaints he has received, to date, about the use by the Royal Ulster Constabulary of plastic bullets in Northern Ireland from 7 July to date. [38959]

Sir John Wheeler: Plastic bullets are not in use in Northern Ireland.

In the period from 7 July 1996 until 19 July 1996, five complaints about the use of plastic baton rounds were received by the complaints and discipline branch of the RUC. One of these complaints has since been withdrawn.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many plastic bullets were fired by Royal Ulster Constabulary officers in Northern Ireland between 7 July and 15 July; how many reports of people injured by plastic bullets and requiring hospital treatment he has received, to date; how many people were detained in hospital; how many people remain, to date, in hospital; and if he will make a statement. [38958]

Sir John Wheeler: Plastic bullets are not in use in Northern Ireland.

During the period from 0600 on 7 July to 0600 on 16 July 1996, approximately 6,000 plastic baton rounds—PBRs—were fired by the RUC.

There are reports of injuries to 149 RUC personnel and 192 civilians during this period. It is not possible at this stage to determine how many of the civilian injuries were caused by PBRs. There are no figures to indicate how many people were detained in hospitals.

New Barnsley RUC Station (Attack)

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Royal Ulster Constabulary officers were injured in the gunfire directed at New Barnsley RUC station; and what was the nature and extent of the attack on the officers. [39040]

Sir John Wheeler: Although a total of 95 rounds of gunfire was directed at New Barnsley RUC station in a number of gun attacks between midnight and 3 am on 13 July, fortunately no police officers were injured as a result.

Petrol Bombs

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many petrol bombs have been recorded as being thrown at the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the last three months; and how many officers have been injured. [39042]

Sir John Wheeler: The RUC do not hold figures relating to the number of petrol bombs thrown, but do collate the number of incidents where petrol bombs are thrown.

Figures for the last three months are not yet available. However, initial estimates would suggest that between 7 and 16 July alone, more than 8,000 petrol bombing incidents were recorded, involving between 16,000 and 24,000 petrol bombs.

Punishment Attacks

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many punishment attacks have been carried out since 1 September 1994, by *(a)* republican and *(b)* loyalist groups. [39041]

Sir John Wheeler: Between 1 September 1994 and 18 July 1996, terrorist gangs in Northern Ireland have carried out 454 so-called punishment attacks, 24 of which were shootings. Of these, 277 have been attributed to republican groups and 177 to loyalist groups.

Intimidation

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on current levels of acts of intimidation against members of the community committed by *(a)* republicans and *(b)* loyalists. [39043]

Sir John Wheeler: It is not possible to sub-divide acts of intimidation into those committed by republicans and those committed by loyalists. However, during the period 0600 on 7 July to 0600 on 16 July, the RUC received reports of 89 cases of intimidation of police personnel and 251 complaints from civilians.

Housing Policy Review

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to publish the outcome of the housing policy review; and if he will make a statement. [39725]

Mr. Moss: I have today placed in the Library of the House the Government's decisions contained in "Building on Success—the Way Ahead" following the period of public consultation. It is now proposed to proceed with the main policies and strategies outlined in the housing policy review, although a number of proposals have been amended in light of the consultation and further considerations. Progress on certain proposals will require legislative change. I am now setting up a small group of senior officials from the Department of the Environment, the Housing Executive and housing associations, to agree the timetable and detailed arrangements for implementation of the decisions.

Criminal Justice Report

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the royal commission's report on criminal justice; and if he will make a statement. [39726]

Sir John Wheeler: The terms of reference of the royal commission did not extend to Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State decided to consider the implications of the report in the context of Northern Ireland.

To facilitate that process, he published consultation papers on "Criminal appeals and arrangements for dealing with alleged miscarriages of justice" (June 1994), "Disclosure in criminal cases in Northern Ireland" (July 1995), and "Committal proceedings in Northern Ireland" (December 1995).

Of the recommendations that are applicable to the arrangements in Northern Ireland, many have been, or are in the course of being, implemented. Where appropriate, this is being achieved through legislation, for example through the Police (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, revisions to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 codes, and through extension of relevant parts of the Criminal Appeal Act 1995 and Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 to Northern Ireland. A number of recommendations including those on corroboration rules, witness intimidation, sentence discounts and police bail are being taken forward in the draft Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order which was published for consultation in May. Others are being pursued by administrative means and some will be further examined in light of the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, including various aspects of pre-trial procedures.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animal Incinerators

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much is paid to the operator of an animal incinerator *(a)* for every bovine spongiform encephalopathy carcase disposed of and *(b)* per tonne for specified bovine offal incinerated. [36853]

Mrs. Browning: The information requested cannot be supplied for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Sheep Dips

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the dates of commencement and the estimated dates of conclusion and publication of the consultation exercises on *(a)* sheep dipping and *(b)* sheep scab control; if he proposes to issue interim reports; and if he will make a statement. [37801]

Mrs. Browning: The consultation exercise on organophosphorus sheep dips formed part of a review of the certificate of competence scheme in the safe use of OP sheep dips by the Veterinary Products Committee which was announced in December 1995. A letter to interested parties was sent out from the Veterinary Medicines Directorate for response by 30 January 1996. The responses were all considered by the VPC in the course of its review. Ministers forming the Licensing Authority expect to receive advice shortly, and an announcement will then be made as soon as possible. Copies of the responses to the consultation letter were placed in the Library of the House.

The consultation document on sheep scab controls was issued on 21 December 1995; comments were sought by 1 March 1996. As part of the consultation process, officials have held meetings with local authority representatives and organisations representing the sheep industry and ancillary trades. Responses to the consultation letter were made available to the public in the main MAFF library on 15 May 1996. I plan a further round of consultation on revised proposals, taking account of the comments received, in the autumn.

Nitrate

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what considerations led him to draw a distinction between nitrate vulnerable zones and nitrate sensitive areas and to compensate farmers and landowners only in the case of the latter. [38330]

Mr. Boswell: Nitrate vulnerable zones have been introduced under Council directive 91/676/EEC. This requires the designation, as vulnerable zones, of land which drains into waters which are, or are expected to be, polluted by nitrate from agriculture. Mandatory measures to reduce and prevent further such pollution will be introduced before the end of 1999. As these measures will be based on good agricultural practice, the question of compensation does not arise.

In contrast, the present nitrate sensitive areas scheme was introduced in 1994 under the terms of Council regulation 2078/92/EEC, the Agri-Environment Regulation. The scheme is designed to provide a quicker and more efficient way of stabilising and reducing rising nitrate levels in key groundwater sources, thereby helping to ensure their future viability. Under the scheme, farmers undertake voluntarily to make substantial changes to their farming practices, going significantly beyond good agricultural practice, in return for compensation. All 32 NSAs are located within designated nitrate vulnerable zones.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has evaluated relating to transgenic mice in relation to *(a)* human prions and *(b)* bovine prions. [36934]

Mrs. Browning: The Department and its expert Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, has considered numerous papers on this subject in recent years. There are several groups now specialising in this area, most notably those led by Professor Prusiner in the United States, Professor Weissman in Switzerland, Professor Collinge in London, and at the BBSRC Institute for Animal Health at Edinburgh and Compton. Professor Collinge also briefed SEAC personally before he became a member of the committee. His most recent paper specifically on the subject was published in *Nature* on 21 December 1995. The Department will be funding development of transgenic models in the current financial year for the study of BSE.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has evaluated relating to Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy transmission to macaques. [36933]

Mrs. Browning: The Department and its independent advisory committee, SEAC have considered the paper published in *Nature* on 27 June 1996 by Dr. Lasmezas and co-workers in France and Dr. Ironside of the CJD surveillance unit, United Kingdom.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to promote European co-operation on *(a)* core data definition and acquisition and *(b)* the quarterly publication of surveillance data on BSE. [36937]

Mrs. Browning: All member states have been circulated with descriptions of the clinical disease as seen in the United Kingdom, including a video presentation of a series of cases. Furthermore, criteria for diagnosis of BSE post mortem have also been agreed internationally, within the EC and world-wide, and published in a scientific and technical review of the Office International des Epizooties (OIE), 1992, Vol 11, No 2. Eds Bradley and Matthews. Indeed, the Central Veterinary Laboratory is the OIE reference laboratory for the diagnosis of BSE.

With respect to acquisition of data, some member states participate in a surveillance programme for rabies in which all cattle that prove to be rabies negative are subsequently examined for the presence of BSE. No cases have been diagnosed by this means.

BSE is a notifiable disease in all member states. Cases must be reported to the Commission and member states weekly in accordance with Council directive 82/894 as amended by Commission decision 90/134.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what scientific research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated to ascertain whether the treatment of cattle with organophosphates has affected the incidence of BSE; and when the use of this treatment was discontinued. [38260]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Epidemiological studies at the beginning of the BSE outbreak showed no correlation between the use of agrochemicals and outbreaks of disease but a correlation with concentrated animal feed. The independent advisory committee, SEAC, considered a number of alternative hypothesis of the cause of BSE in its report published in 1994, which is in the Library of the House, including the role of organophosphorus compounds, but decided that none of the hypotheses was sufficiently strong to justify extending the current research programme to cover them. Epidemiological studies continue to show the absence of a link between OP compounds and BSE, not only in the UK but in Switzerland where there have been over 200 cases of BSE but Phosmet is licensed for the treatment of warble fly in cattle.

OP compounds continue to be licensed for the treatment of cattle in Great Britain.

Multi-annual Guidance Programme

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the extent to which the United Kingdom will meet its commitments under MAGP III; what assessment he has made of the implementation of MAGP III in other EU nations; and if he will make a statement. [39164]

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter) on 20 June, *Official Report* columns 626–28. The Commission will shortly issue its 1995 annual report on implementation by the member states. I submitted an unnumbered explanatory memorandum on this document on 9 July. The report will be deposited in the House Library in the usual way.

Tuberculosis

Sir Jim Spicer: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will instigate an independent scientific review on tuberculosis in cattle and badgers; and if he will make a statement. [39666]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend and the House that, following consultations with interested parties, the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and I have decided to set up an independent scientific review into the policy on TB and badgers. Professor John Krebs, who is chief executive of the Natural Environment Research Council has kindly agreed to chair the review, which is expected to report in the early summer next year. The membership of the review team will be announced later, together with the date when the review will commence. The current control policy for bovine tuberculosis will continue for the duration of the review.

The terms of reference for the review will be:

"To review the incidence of tuberculosis in cattle and badgers and assess the scientific evidence for the links between them; to take account of EU policies on reducing and eliminating the incidence of tuberculosis in cattle; to take account of any risk to the human population; and accordingly to review, in the light of scientific evidence, present Government policy on badgers and tuberculosis and to make recommendations."

Common Fisheries Policy Review Group

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the report of the common fisheries policy review group will be published. [39668]

Mr. Baldry: The report will be published on 24 July and copies will be placed in the Library.

Environment Agency (Flood Warnings)

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the role of the Environment Agency in the dissemination of flood warnings to the public in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [39667]

Mr. Boswell: Following a review by a Ministry-chaired working group involving representatives of interested organisations, it was agreed last year that with effect from 1 September 1996, the Environment Agency, as the successor body to the National Rivers Authority, would assume the lead role in disseminating flood warnings to emergency services, local authorities, other statutory bodies and to people and businesses. This was formalised by means of a ministerial direction to the NRA last March which has been inherited by the Environment Agency.

The NRA, and subsequently the agency, has been preparing local flood warning dissemination plans in consultation with the police and local authorities with the aim of providing timely, accurate flood warnings for locations at risk throughout England and Wales where a flood forecasting system exists. These plans will be held at the agency's area offices concerned. With the aid of grant from the Ministry and Welsh Office the agency is installing automatic voice messaging systems to improve the provision of flood warning information to the public. It will be publicising the new arrangements by various means, including the issuing of leaflets to people and organisations in flood risk areas.

Livestock Exports

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the report by J. Panting into livestock export procedures as pursued by Jonathan Stirling is to be completed and published. [32326]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* My investigation officers have carried out a thorough investigation of the allegations made in the Channel 4 "Dispatches" programme which was broadcast earlier this year. The investigation included consideration of the material provided by the programme makers to the Department following the broadcast.

A report was submitted by the investigation branch to the Department's prosecution lawyers at the beginning of June. The lawyers have now considered the report and concluded that there is no evidence which would give rise to criminal charges against anyone featured in the "Dispatches" programme nor was there any evidence to substantiate the allegations of serious misconduct by the LVI featured in the programme.

Reports of investigations carried out by investigation officers of the Department are not published.

Statistical Forms

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the statistical forms issued to businesses by his Department and the number sent out of each. [37464]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* During 1995 there were 96 statistical surveys to businesses conducted by MAFF and its agencies. Most of these were fairly small and 38 had fewer than 100 addresses. A table setting out the surveys conducted and the number of businesses approached in 1995 will be placed in the Library of the House.

The Ministry has set targets to cut compliance cost of regular surveys to farmers in line with the recommendations of the deregulation task force. This will result in a reduction in compliance cost to farmers of some 35 per cent. in real terms in the four years up to 1998–99.

Notable achievements during 1995 included the introduction of sampling to the June census of agriculture and horticulture so that smaller farms need not be surveyed annually. Some 35,000 fewer forms were sent out in 1995. In addition, the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 was used to exempt small traders from having to make weekly returns under the Corn Returns Act of 1882, leading to a 40 per cent. reduction in compliance costs.

Licences

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the licences currently issued by his Department, indicating their function and the annual administrative costs for each. [37810]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 19 July 1996]:* The Ministry is responsible for issuing the following business licences:

Registration of owners or keepers of pigs with local MAFF animal health office;

Registration of owners or keepers of cattle with local animal health office;

Registration of poultry breeding flocks and hatcheries;

Approval of premises handling specified bovine offal;

Approval and registration of premises handling animal by-products;

Registration of animal protein processors;

Licences for processing of waste food;

Licences for holding of waste food;

Licence to hold animal markets held on unpaved premises;

Importation and transfer of pathogens and carriers of pathogens under Import of Animal Pathogens Order 1980;

Importation of pathogens and carriers of pathogens under Specified Animal Pathogens Order 1993;

Importation and quarantine of rabies-susceptible animals;

Registration by owners or keepers of sheep or goats with local Animal Health Offices;

Registration of premises recovering meat from bovine bones by mechanical processes;

Registration of laboratories under the Poultry Breeding Flocks and Hatcheries Order 1993;

Registration of laboratories under the Processed Animal Protein Order 1989;

Movement of processed animal protein which has been tested for salmonella

Exemption licence from requirement to test material for salmonella;

Movement of bulls to a semen collection centre to donate semen;

Storage of bovine semen;

Processing of bovine semen;

Farm storage of bovine semen;

Supply of bovine semen (including semen shops);

Sheep and goats: embryo collection teams and semen collection centre;

Operation of a farm storage servicing business;

Bovine embryo collection/production/transfer teams and storage facilities;

Movement of boars to semen collection centres to donate semen;

Operation of a porcine semen collection centre;

Importation of genetic material from sheep, goats, pigs and cattle;
Importation of captive birds, poultry and hatching eggs;
Importation of cattle, sheep, goats, other ruminating animals and swine;
Importation of hay and straw;
Food irradiation and licensing of premises;
Export of breeding animals;
Export of horses and ponies;
Classifiers of beef carcasses;
Licences to control the deposit of material at sea;
Registration of milk production holdings;
Approval of establishments processing dairy products;
Approval of egg product establishments;
Commercial fishing in external and specified waters;
Commercial fishing in community waters;
Trans-shipment of pelagic sea fish;
Transit licence for queen bees between third countries via the UK;
Importation of live and dead bees for research purposes;
Importation of queen bees from third countries;
Burning of heather, grass gorse or vaccinium at certain times of year;
Keeping of mink for fur-farming;
Licensing of slaughtermen;
Approval of fresh meat premises (including slaughterhouses and premises exporting wild game);
Approval of meat products and other products of animal origin premises and premises manufacturing minced meat and meat preparations for trade with member states;
Importation of animal and poultry products;
Registration of egg packing stations;
Registration of egg producers to market eggs with a Special Marketing Term;
Registration of hatcheries and breeding establishments;
Importation, moving or keeping of prohibited plant material, soil, pests etc;
Disposal of waste from imported vegetables;
Plant protection products: approval under EC rules for sale, supply and use;
Plant protection products: approval for R&D under EC rules;
Pesticide products: approval under UK rules for sale, supply, advertisement, storage and use;
Pesticide products: experimental permits for supply, storage and use granted under UK rules;
Authorisation of pesticide adjuvants under UK rules;
Purchase of strychnine to kill moles;
Registration of seed merchants, processors and packers;
Licensed seed testing stations;
Licensed seed samplers;
Licensed crop inspectors;
Registration of fish and shellfish farms;
Importation of salmonid viscera from third countries;
Importation of live fish and shellfish (and their eggs and gametes) from third countries;
Deposit of lobsters in designated areas;
Animal test certificates;
Manufacturer's licence for veterinary medicines;
Wholesale dealer's licence for veterinary medicines;
Product licences for zootechnical feed additives;
Marketing authorisations for veterinary medicinal products.
Information on the administration costs associated with each licence could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Fisheries

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what enforcement actions fishery protection vessels have taken against Danish vessels engaged in industrial fishing on the north-east bank; [38253]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact of industrial fishing for sandeels by Danish vessels on the north-east bank on fish stocks and on the ability of vessels from local ports to pursue the haddock and whiting fishery; [38254]

(3) what mesh size limits apply to vessels engaged in industrial fishing for sandeels on the north-east bank; [38255]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Sandeeling is subject to common fishery policy regulations. However, the United Kingdom in pressing for the introduction of precautionary total allowable catches as well as further research to increase our understanding of the impact of industrial fishing on other species.

Nets used to catch sandeels in the North sea from 1 November to the last day of February must have a minimum mesh size of 16 millimetres. No mesh size restrictions are applied to sandeel fisheries at other times but throughout the year the maximum permissible by-catch of all protected species, including haddock and whiting, is 10 per cent.

Aerial surveillance on 2 and 9 July identified up to 52 industrial trawlers in the area of the north-east bank. That number had fallen to four on 16 July. In the period of peak activity some 25 inspections were carried out by Royal Navy fishery protection vessels without any infringements being found.

Mr. Jonathan Stirling

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many export consignments of animals Mr. Jonathan Stirling has been involved with as an local veterinary inspector since 1 July. [38411]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Mr. Jonathan Stirling did not carry out any LVI duties with respect to the export of any consignment of cattle, sheep or pigs during the period 1 July to 15 July 1996.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to publish the report of the inquiry into Mr. Stirling's role as an LVI. [38412]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* My investigation officers have carried out a thorough investigation of the allegations made in the Channel 4 "Dispatches" programme which was broadcast earlier this year. The investigation included consideration of the material provided by the programme makers to the Department following broadcast.

A report was submitted by the investigation branch to the Department's prosecution lawyers at the beginning of June. The lawyers have now considered the report and concluded that there is no evidence which would give rise to criminal charges against anyone featured in the "Dispatches" programme nor was there any evidence to substantiate the allegations of serious misconduct by the LVI featured in the programme.

Reports of investigations carried out by investigation officers of the Department are not published.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if export health certificates, issued by

his Department for the ovines destined for EU member states, request the certifying veterinarian to verify that he has conducted an examination of each animal and recorded individual ear tag numbers. [38414]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Model health certifications for intra-Community trade in sheep and goats are laid down in Council directive 91/68/EEC. The certifying veterinary officer is required to confirm that the animals were inspected on the day of certification, which must be no more than 48 hours prior to loading, and show no clinical sign of disease. The eartag number of each animal must be recorded on the certificate.

WALES

Winter Deaths

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what the excess winter mortality rates have been in Wales for each of the last 10 years expressed *(a)* in excess numbers and *(b)* as percentages; [38024]

(2) how many deaths have been recorded in Wales for each of the past 10 years in the period December to March. [38025]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is given in the following table. The amount by which deaths occurring in December to March exceed the average of those occurring in the previous and following four month periods is defined as excess winter deaths.

Winter deaths in Wales, 1985–86 to 1994–95

Year	Number of deaths in December to March	Excess deaths: Number	Excess deaths: Percentage[1]
1985–86	13,722	2,852	26.2
1986–87	12,415	1,867	17.7
1987–88	12,438	1,675	15.6
1988–89	11,902	919	8.4
1989–90	13,752	2,954	27.4
1990–91	13,007	2,327	21.8
1991–92	12,529	2,001	19.0
1992–93	12,121	1,361	12.6
1993–94	12,505	1,009	8.8
1994–95	12,551	1,661	15.3

[1] Excess winter deaths as a percentage of the average of the autumn and summer deaths.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the total amount of *(a)* useable capital receipts and *(b)* receipts set aside as provision for credit liability, held by each local authority in Wales at 31 March. [37977]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The latest available information was given in my answer to the hon. Member on 16 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *730–31*. I will write to the hon. Member when the figures for 31 March 1996 are available and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Inward Investment

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy that the budget of the Welsh Office and the Welsh Development Agency for securing inward investment projects and developing indigenous industry in locations in Wales outside the M4 corridor in south-east Wales will not be reduced or restricted as a result of the LG project at Newport; and if he will make a statement. [37855]

Mr. Hague: I will make decisions on future budgets later in the year in the usual way as part of the public expenditure survey, taking into account the total amount available to me in my block and the various demands upon it, including the need to promote and encourage economic development across all parts of Wales.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what strategy the Welsh Office has for increasing the number of producer services serving the needs of manufacturing industry in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [37856]

Mr. Hague: My plans for supporting the Welsh economy were published on 13 June in "Meeting the Challenge—The Competitiveness of Wales", copies of which are available in the Library of the House. It describes the services available to stimulate company growth, all of which can be accessed through Business Connect on 0345 96 97 98.

Health Service Managers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many health service managers there were in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1991; and if he will make a statement. [38835]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: At 30 September 1991 there were 711 whole-time equivalent managers—staff paid on manager payscales—in the NHS in Wales. The figure for 30 September 1995 was 1,350 and 31 March 1996, the latest available, 1,321. Figures for the later years may include staff who have been reclassified as managers from other staff groups since 1991. The whole-time equivalent number of all administrative and clerical staff, including managers, was 8,865 at 30 September 1991, 9,875 at 30 September 1995 and 9,808 at 31 March 1996.

NHS Bureaucracy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to reduce bureaucracy in the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [38908]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Excellent progress has been made in reducing unnecessary bureaucracy in the NHS in Wales, and further major initiatives are planned.

The number of health authorities has been reduced from 16 to five. Within three years, the number of staff employed by these authorities should have fallen by nearly a third. On the basis of the latest estimates from health authorities, this reduction should release £10 million per year for spending on direct patient care.

This saving will be in addition to the £12.5 million transferred from management costs to patient care over the financial years 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97 as called for in "Caring for the Future".

We have also cut the burden of form filling on the NHS. Since 1993–94, successive reviews have reduced the number of forms used by the Welsh Office to collect information from the NHS from over 100 to about 60. These reviews also resulted in significant cuts in the size of many of the remaining forms.

More broadly, action is already being taken to implement the "Patients not Paper" initiative to reduce the burden of bureaucracy on GP practices and other parts of the primary care sector.

In addition, the Dpearmtent is currently consulting on how best to implement in Wales the recommendations of the comparable efficiency scrutiny of burdens on health authorities and NHS trusts, "Seeing the Woods, Sparing the Trees". An announcement on the action to be taken on this will be made in the autumn.

Consultant Anaesthetists

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many consultant anaesthetists there are in each of the health trusts in Wales. [38834]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on permanent staff in post is given in the following table.

Consultant anaesthetists in post at 30 September 1995

NHS trust/directly managed unit	*Whole-time equivalent number*
Bridgend and District NHS Trust	7.5
Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS Trust	0.6
Carmarthen and District NHS Trust	7.0
Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust	5.0
East Glamorgan NHS Trust	6.4
Glan Clwyd Hospital NHS Trust	8.6
Glan Hafren NHS Trust	15.5
Glan-y-Mor NHS Trust	4.0
Gwynedd Hospitals NHS Trust	10.0
Llandough Hospital NHS Trust	5.0
Llanelli Dinefwr NHS Trust	3.0
Merthyr Cynon Health Unit	5.0
Morriston NHS Trust	8.8
Nevill Hall and District NHS Trust	6.0
Pembrokeshire NHS Trust	5.0
Powys Health Care NHS Trust	0.1
Rhymney Valley Health Unit	1.2
Swansea NHS Trust	9.1
University Dental Hospital NHS Trust	0.5
University Hospital of Wales NHS Trust	22.8
Wrexham Maelor NHS Trust	9.0

Private Finance Initiatives

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many private finance initiatives schemes there are in Wales; and in what location. [38838]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There are two Welsh Office approved private finance initiative projects: a new computer system for the Welsh Office and a multi-storey car park for the University hospital of Wales. For information about projects under consideration I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) on 22 July 1996.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of ambulance response times in Wales. [38832]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In 1995–96, 95 per cent. of emergency ambulances across Wales arrived within target times specified in the patients charter. This is seen as a marked improvement given that the number of emergency patients carried in the period increased by 6 per cent. on the previous year.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to further reduce waiting times for hospital appointments. [38836]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The NHS in Wales is to be congratulated on its achievement in cutting the waiting times for outpatient appointments sharply during the course of 1995–96.

The NHS has committed itself to building on this success in 1996–97 using the special funds available for this purpose. Health authorities are planning on the basis that by 31 March 1997, no patient will have waited more than six months for a first appointment.

Road Signs (National Borders)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the current provision of road signage on the road network marking the border between Wales and England. [38634]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It is our policy to erect bilingual "Welcome to Wales" signs on or close to the border.

School Inspections

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is the average length of Office for Standards in Education inspections in *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary schools; and if he will make a statement; [38820]

(2) what is his estimate of the average cost of *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary Ofsted inspections in the most recent year for which figures are available. [38819]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: These are matters for the Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales, who heads the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member, and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library of the House.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent representations he has received concerning farm animal welfare. [38822]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: We continue to receive a steady flow of representations on farm animal welfare issues.

Long-term Unemployed

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to assist the long-term unemployed. [38824]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A range of new incentives making it easier for the long-term unemployed to take up employment will be available in October when the jobseekers' allowance is introduced.

The training and enterprise councils and the Employment Service in Wales will continue to provide training for work and other services including advice, jobclub and the job interview guarantee scheme to assist the long term unemployed back into work.

Public Library Services

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning the future of public library services. [38826]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *852*, by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for National Heritage. The policy paper on the Government's continuing review of public libraries will be published as soon as practicable.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are currently employed in the public library services in Wales. [38827]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A total of 1,184 people were employed in public libraries services in Wales on 31 March 1995—the most recent figures held centrally.

Surgical Operations

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average cost of an NHS in-patient operation. [38828]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The cost of inpatient care varies sharply depending on the procedure involved. However, based on provisional figures for 1996–97 supplied by NHS trusts in Wales, the average cost of in-patient admissions involving the most common surgical procedures is £1,800. Taking into account day case procedures, the average cost is £1,000.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many in-patient operations were performed in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1995. [38829]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: About 240,800 in-patient operations performed in NHS hospitals in Wales during 1992. Data for 1995 are not yet complete but it is estimated that around 250,000 operations were performed.

General Practitioners

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent assessment he has made of the available supply of general practitioners in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [38833]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Although there is no overall shortage of general practitioners, I am aware that some practices are experiencing difficulty in recruitment. Health authorities are monitoring the situation and the Department will also consult professional interests as appropriate.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of tuberculosis occurred in Wales in the last year; in which locations; and if he will make a statement. [38837]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is given in the following table:

Cases of Tuberculosis notified during 1995

Bro Taf Health Authority	69
Dyfed Powys Health Authority	28
Gwent Health Authority	24
Morgannwg Health Authority	29
North Wales Health Authority	34

Source:
PHLS CDSC (Welsh Unit).

Cardiac Rehabilitation Units

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cardiac rehabilitation units there are in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [38831]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not held centrally.

Inward Investment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the average cost to public funds of creating a full-time job from inward investment. [38821]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The evaluation of regional selective assistance offers made during 1985–1988 (HMSO 1993) estimated a net cost for each year of employment created by regional assistance to foreign firms of between £750 to £950, at 1990 prices.

Higher Education

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from the higher education sector concerning the planned funding for the immediate years ahead. [38823]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: This year my right hon. Friend, hon. Friends and I have received six letters from representatives of higher education institutions about the funding of higher education. We have also received nine letters from others within the sector. My right hon. Friend has also met the heads of Higher Education Wales.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 26 April, *Official Report*, column *319*, about spending on higher education in Wales, if he will supply the information requested for the earliest year after 1980–81 for which it is available. [39012]

Mr. Evans: The provision for 1993–94—the earliest year for which information is available—was £4,937 (cash) and £5,025 (real terms).

School Security

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has developed concerning security in schools; and if he will make a statement. [38825]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The report by the working group on school security was distributed in Wales on 14 June. The Government have welcomed and accepted all its recommendations and we are considering how best to implement them in Wales.

Funding from the Welsh Office has been given to enable eight schools in Wales to benefit from the Home Office's closed circuit television challenge. The Home Office will be running a further competition for 1997–98 financial year.

Guidance on security of school premises is being finalised and will be available later this year.

Play Wales

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning Welsh Office financial support for Play Wales; and when he expects to make an announcement concerning a funding decision. [38880]

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* My right hon. Friend has received representations from a wide range of interests about future funding arrangements for Play Wales. He hopes to make an announcement in the near future.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 4 July, *Official Report*, column *507*, if he will provide a breakdown of cases and suspected cases of CJD by unitary authority area without naming the authorities concerned. [38621]

Mr. Gwilym Jones *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* For confidentiality reasons I do not propose to publish any information which could lead to the identification of patients.

Schools (Opting Out)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 8 July, *Official Report*, column *42*, about complaints in respect of opt-out status, what factors made it difficult to provide information without incurring disproportionate costs. [39017]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: A significant number of ballots on grant-maintained status have been accompanied by complaints about the material distributed to parents and the activities of those campaigning in the run-up to the ballot. To provide the details requested would have involved a comprehensive search of a large number of departmental files in order to identify the number of correspondents, the nature of their complaints, and the action taken by officials in respect of any complaints as well as their consideration of the material issued by the school, its local education authority, and third parties.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the last 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical result of such monitoring. [39180]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Government recognise the crucial role played by small firms in the United Kingdom economy and aim to help them by providing sound economic conditions—keeping inflation and interest rates low; reducing legislative, administrative and taxation burdens; and where appropriate providing direct assistance in the form of specialist advice and support and easing access to finance.

Details of Welsh Office policies and programmes to help small firms in the Principality to grow and improve their competitiveness are provided in "Meeting the Challenge—the Competitiveness of Wales" which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales published on 13 June. A copy is available in the Library of the House.

Public Bodies

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the last 50 appointments he has made both new and re-appointments to non-departmental public bodies, NHS trusts or other non-elected body which provides services to the public with financial support from his Department. [39015]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Details are set out in "Appointments by the Secretary of State for Wales", 1 June 1996, which is available in the Library of the House.

Companies (Grants)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been paid in grants out of public funds to *(a)* Howlett (South-East) Ltd., *(b)* Guardian Maintenance Ltd. and *(c)* G. H. Smith (South-East) Ltd., during the last five years, giving the total amount paid and the purposes for which such grants was made. [38266]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office has not made any payments to the three named companies during the past five years.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, are budgeted to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39381]

Mr. Hague: Twenty-four full time staff.

Child Labour

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will adopt the policy of the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department in respect of publication of the responses to his consultation document on school-age children who work. [38672]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Copies of the replies from organisations in Wales to the consultation document "Employment of Children" is available for inspection in the Welsh Office Library, Cathays park, Cardiff.

Licences

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the licences issued by his Department; for what purpose they are issued; and what are the administrative costs for each. [38684]

Mr. Hague: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

School Exclusions and Expulsions

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for the last available three years for each county and for Wales as a whole, the number of school exclusions or expulsions recorded for *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* all schools, indicating the percentage of such exclusions or expulsions as a proportion of overall pupil numbers in each case. [38944]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Information is available in respect of the 1994–95 academic year only. This information, shown in the following table, is derived from an early analysis of the January 1996 schools census. Results for the new unitary authorities are not yet available.

Number and percentage of pupils leaving school, aged 16 and over, without any GCSE A' or AS level qualifications

Maintained schools in:	*1989–90*[1]	*1990–91*[1]	*1991–92*[2]	*1992–93*[2]	*1993–94*[2]
Clwyd	355 (7 per cent.)	335 (8 per cent.)	450 (10 per cent.)	380 (9 per cent.)	310 (7 per cent.)
Dyfed	565 (14 per cent.)	570 (15 per cent.)	335 (9 per cent.)	405 (10 per cent.)	350 (9 per cent.)
Gwent	815 (15 per cent.)	900 (18 per cent.)	645 (13 per cent.)	635 (14 per cent.)	620 (13 per cent.)
Gwynedd	325 (11 per cent.)	280 (10 per cent.)	235 (9 per cent.)	205 (7 per cent.)	145 (6 per cent.)
Mid Glamorgan	1,570 (24 per cent.)	1,280 (20 per cent.)	1,100 (19 per cent.)	915 (16 per cent.)	950 (17 per cent.)
Powys	105 (7 per cent.)	45 (3 per cent.)	75 (6 per cent.)	65 (5 per cent.)	70 (6 per cent.)
South Glamorgan	680 (15 per cent.)	560 (13 per cent.)	645 (14 per cent.)	575 (14 per cent.)	555 (13 per cent.)
West Glamorgan	650 (15 per cent.)	385 (9 per cent.)	500 (12 per cent.)	470 (12 per cent.)	375 (9 per cent.)
Wales (including Independent schools)	5,080 (14 per cent.)	4,400 (13 per cent.)	4,030 (12 per cent.)	3,695 (12 per cent.)	3,395 (11 per cent.)

[1] From School Examinations Survey, of a sample of school leavers:
[2] From Intended Destinations of Pupils (RD1) Survey.

Agency Printing Costs

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the agencies for which his Department is responsible indicating for each the costs incurred for printing *(a)* all publications and *(b)* the annual report in the last available year. [38670]

Mr. Hague: Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments is the only executive agency for which the Welsh Office has sole responsibility. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. T. J. Cassidy, to provide a reply.

Letter from T. J. Cassidy to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about printing costs incurred by Cadw (an Executive Agency of the Welsh Office) in the last year.

The cost of printing for publications in the year ended 31 March 1996 is:

	£
Annual Report	[1] 8,561.00
Interpretive publications (guidebooks and other similar material)	62,523.00
Corporate publications (information booklets)	13,334.00
Total	84,418.00

[1] (Printed by HMSO).

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners

1. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effect of the introduction of a higher guaranteed minimum income for pensioners on incentives to save. [36956]

Mr. Lilley: Any guaranteed minimum income scheme for pensioners set significantly above income support levels would involve means-testing all pensioners and would weaken the incentive for individuals to save for their retirement.

Single Mothers

13. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the earnings disregard, with particular reference to single mothers on benefit. [36968]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The earnings disregard is part of our three-fold strategy for lone parents: namely, to help and encourage lone parents to take up work through work incentives, to ensure that both parents take responsibility for their children and that maintenance is properly paid, and to ensure even-handed treatment of one and two parent families.

Pensioner Incomes

15. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the average change in pensioner incomes in real terms since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [36970]

Mr. Heald: Pensioners' average net incomes, before housing costs, increased by 51 per cent. in real terms, between 1979 and 1993.

Source:

Pensioners' Incomes Series 1993, based on information drawn from the Family Expenditure Surveys 1979 and 1993.

Family Credit

16. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were in receipt of family credit in the year of its introduction; and how many currently receive it. [36971]

Mr. Roger Evans: Currently, 643,000 families receive family credit compared with 282,000 families in 1988.

Source:

Family Credit Quarterly Statistical Enquiry October 1995.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current expenditure on family credit *(a)* in total and *(b)* on the child care allowance; and if he will express *(c)* as a percentage of the total. [34228]

Mr. Roger Evans: Estimated out-turn on family credit in 1995–96 was £1,682 million. Figures for expenditure on childcare disregard in 1995–96 are not yet available. However, we provisionally estimate that the cost of the disregard from its introduction in October 1994 to the end of February 1996 was £17.8 million.

Sources:

1996 Departmental Report.

Family Credit 5 per cent. sample of awards.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of family credit are *(a)* self-employed and *(b)* employed; what is the estimated expenditure in each case; how many of those employed are at an hourly rate of (i) less than £2.50, (ii) £2.51 to £3.00, (iii) £3.01 to £3.50, (iv) £3.51 to £4.00, (v) £4.01 to £4.50 and (vi) £4.51 and above; and what is the average benefit payable in each case. [39109]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the tables.

Family credit caseload and expenditure by employment type

Occupation	*Number of cases*	*Annual expenditure (£ million)*
Self-employed	96,000	297
Employed	547,000	1,385

Employed family credit recipients by hourly earnings and average benefit payable

Hourly earnings	*Number of cases*	*Average weekly family credit (£)*
£2.50 and under	67,000	73.64
£2.51–£3.00	66,000	65.67
£3.01–£3.50	101,000	60.34
£3.51–£4.00	87,000	52.43
£4.01–£4.50	73,000	44.99
£4.51 and above	154,000	35.43

Sources:

1. 1996 Departmental Report and Family Credit 5 per cent. sample of awards (October 1995)—all numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand.

2. 1996 Departmental Report 5 per cent. sample of Family Credit cases.

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount paid out in family credit to people in *(a)* the south-west region, *(b)* the county of Dorset and *(c)* each district in Dorset in each of the last five financial years. [38166]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table:

Figures for the amount of family credit in Wales and south western region

	£ million
1991–92	87
1992–93	133
1993–94	163
1994–95	198
1995–96	233

The figures for 1995–96 have been derived by apportioning the estimate of total family credit expenditure published in the departmental report, and must, therefore, be treated with caution. All other figures relate to March each year.

Guaranteed Minimum Pension

17. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost of introducing a guaranteed minimum pension of £80 a week. [36972]

Mr. Lilley: It is estimated that a guarantee set at this level which takes account of all sources of taxable income would cost up to £4½ billion at 1996–97 prices.

Benefits Freeline Service

18. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the consequences of the abolition of the benefits freeline service. [36973]

Mr. Roger Evans: No one will lose out through the closure of the freeline service. Customers will be encouraged to contact their local office where direct links can be made between benefit advice and personal circumstances. Freeline has no access to individual customer details and has never been able to give information specific to claims—the very reason people ring. We are directing our resources to where they are needed most as any organisation must do in order to keep operating costs in check. This decision will mean that we can keep much needed local services running.

26. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people used his Department's freephone help line in the last year. [36981]

Mr. Roger Evans: The freeline service took 3,237,711 calls from April 1995 to March 1996.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he proposes to maintain the freeline service offering confidential advice and information on benefits, pensions, and national insurance; how many calls have been received in each year, to date, since the service was introduced; and if he will make a statement. [38581]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Max Madden, dated 22 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he proposes to maintain the Freeline service offering confidential advice and information on benefits, pensions, and national insurance; how many calls have been received in each year, to date, since the service was introduced; and if he will make a statement.

The Freeline service closed on 12 July, customers are being encouraged to contact their local benefit offices. The closure will allow resources to be refocused so that the customer is in touch with the staff who administer their claims or who can directly link the benefits available with the specific personal details of the customer.

Freeline, Social Security has been operating since 1984, however information about the number of calls is available only from 1993. The number of calls received has been taken to mean the number of calls answered by an adviser.

The number of calls answered are shown in the table below:

	Number
April 1993 to March 1994	1.5 million
April 1994 to March 1995	2.6 million
April 1995 to March 1996	3.2 million
April 1996 to 12 July 1996	800,000

These figures are rounded to the nearest 100,000.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if the telephone advice service to local offices to replace the social security freeline service will be free to callers; [38610]

(2) what monitoring he will set in place to review the effect of the cancellation of the freeline social security service on the take up of benefits. [38609]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mrs. Helen Jackson, dated 22 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking if the telephone advice service to local offices to replace the Social Security Service Freeline service will be free to callers and what monitoring he will set in place to review the effect of the cancellation of the Freeline Social Security Service on the take up of benefits.

Many customers who contacted Freeline had to make subsequent contact with their local benefit office in order to pursue their enquiry. These calls were not free and there are no proposals to make calls to local benefit offices free now that Freeline has closed.

It is not expected that the closure of Freeline will have a significant effect on the take up of benefits. Advice and information about benefit entitlement is available through the Agency's network of local benefit offices. Benefit literature is readily available in local offices, post offices and numerous other outlets. There are no proposals to review the effect of the closure of Freeline on the take up of benefits.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to explain the position.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual cost saving to his Department of the abandonment of the Social Security freeline telephone service for claimants; and how many claimants made use of the telephone freeline service in the last year. [38608]

Mr. Evans: This is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mrs. Helen Jackson, dated 22 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking what is the annual cost saving to his Department of the abandonment of the Social Security Freeline telephone service for claimants; and how many claimants made use of the telephone Freeline service in the last year.

The annual cost savings following the closure of the Social Security Freeline service are estimated at £3m for the financial year 1996/97 and £6.25m thereafter.

Statistics show that in the period April 1995 to March 1996, Freeline answered 3.2 million calls and in the period April 1996 to closure on 12 July answered 800,000 calls. These figures are rounded to the nearest 100,000.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Cold Weather Payments

19. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to conclude his annual review of the system of cold weather payments; and if he will make a statement. [36974]

Mr. Roger Evans: Further to the reply given to the hon. Member on 21 May, *Official Report*, column *93* I expect the review to be completed shortly.

Private and Social Insurance

20. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the relative costs of private and social insurance in the welfare system. [36975]

Mr. Heald: We have made no estimates which cover the welfare system as a whole. Furthermore, private and state schemes are unlikely to be directly comparable. Even within the area of private insurance, plans tend to show considerable variation in charges between different types of scheme and the individual's requirements.

Income Support

21. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received about paying income support to 16 and 17-year-olds. [36976]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Department has received a small number of representations.

24. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children are now living in families that claim income support and associated benefits; and what was the equivalent figure in 1979. [36979]

Mr. Burt: A total of 4.04 million children live in families receiving income support, housing benefit or council tax benefit. It is not possible to make a direct comparison with the position in 1979.

Source:

Income Support Statistics, Quarterly Enquiry May 1995.

Social Security Statistics 1979.

Housing Benefit Management Information System annual 1 per cent. sample taken at the end of May 1995.

28. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many men aged 60 to 64 years receive income support. [36983]

Mr. Evans: There are 185,000 men aged between 60 and 64 in receipt of income support.

Source:

Income Support Statistics, Quarterly Enquiry August 1995.

Note:

Figure is rounded to nearest thousand.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people in *(a)* York and *(b)* North Yorkshire were in receipt of supplementary benefit or income support in (i) 1979, (ii) 1983, (iii) 1987, (iv) 1992 and (v) currently; [38902]

(2) how many children and what percentage of all children in *(a)* York and *(b)* North Yorkshire lived in families in receipt of supplementary benefit or income support in (i) 1979, (ii) 1983, (iii) 1987, (iv) 1992 and (v) currently. [38869]

Mr. Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 22 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking how many people in (a) York and (b) North Yorkshire in (i) 1979, (ii) 1983, (iii) 1987, (iv) 1992 and (v) currently were in receipt of Supplementary Benefit or Income Support (IS), and how many children and what percentage of all children lived in families in receipt of Supplementary Benefit or IS.

The information is not available in the format requested. The Benefits Agency (BA) collate statistics by District Office. These Districts do not correspond to constituency boundaries or to specific county boundaries. The available information is shown in the attached tables which relate to the BA's Districts of North Yorkshire, East Yorkshire, Yorkshire Pennine, Leeds and Hull. The Districts of East Yorkshire, Yorkshire Pennine, Leeds and Hull include areas which are outside North Yorkshire.

There is no information available for North Yorkshire prior to 1991. Information for York is included in the North Yorkshire District, which includes the offices of York, Harrogate and Northallerton.

We do not collate statistics on the number or percentage of children who live in families in receipt of benefit.

Table A relates to the actual number of successful Income Support (IS) claims for 1992 and 1996. Table B relates to the actual number of people in receipt of IS on the last working day of May 1992 and May 1996.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Table A: Number of successful income support claims

BA districts	*January to December 1992*	*January to June 1996*
North Yorkshire[1]	25,015	10,342
East Yorkshire	16,288	7,726
Yorkshire Pennine	17,684	9,896
Leeds	49,218	20,299
Hull	35,045	14,994

[1] North Yorkshire District includes the offices of York, Harrogate and Northallerton.

Table B: Number in receipt of income support

BA districts	*May 1992*	*May 1996*
North Yorkshire[1]	28,251	31,394
East Yorkshire	21,344	24,562
Yorkshire Pennine	30,389	31,033
Leeds	66,744	70,997
Hull	48,413	51,970

[1] North Yorkshire District includes the offices of York, Harrogate and Northallerton.

The area of North Yorkshire is covered by the BA's Districts of North Yorkshire, East Yorkshire (which includes the offices of Scarborough, Bridlington and Goole), Yorkshire Pennine (which includes the offices Halifax, Keighley and Skipton), Leeds (which includes the offices of Leeds East, Leeds North, Leeds North West, Leeds South and Leeds West), and Hull (which includes the offices of Hull West, Hull East and Hull East Outstation).

The information has been provided by the Central Data Unit, is provisional and may be subject to change.

Benefits Agency

22. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to improve the quality of service received by clients attending Benefits Agency offices. [36977]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Benefits Agency continues to be committed to maintaining caller facilities that meet the needs of the local community.

Social Security Reforms

23. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the extent to which industrial action has been taken in response to recent social security reforms *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in other EU countries. [36978]

Mr. Lilley: In the United Kingdom we began to respond to the demographic, social and economic changes common to most industrial nations rather earlier than other countries, and have been able to avoid disruption by taking a longer-term perspective. I have done this by introducing reform measures gradually on a sector-by-sector basis to maintain an effective, efficient and affordable welfare system.

There has been no industrial action outside of my Department of which I am aware and very little adverse reaction from my own Department's staff. Other EU countries including Germany, France, Belgium and Italy, have been dogged by major disruption and unrest during their recent attempts to contain the cost of providing a welfare system.

Private Insurance Companies

27. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what role private insurance companies play in his Department's policy making. [36982]

Mr. Burt: In developing social security policies, we consult a wide range of interested parties, including, when appropriate, private insurance companies.

Telephone Advice Services

29. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the role of telephone advice services in the social security system. [36984]

Mr. Burt: The Department and its agencies have a range of telephone advice services offering a variety of relevant services to different customer groups.

State Pension (Retirement Age)

30. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what flexibility about the age of retirement is contained in the Government's state pension arrangements. [36985]

Mr. Heald: Our aim is to maximise choice and flexibility in pension provision, whilst maintaining a balance between the interests of the taxpayer and of the pensioner.

Currently individuals can take advantage of the flexibility within the state scheme by deferring their state pension for up to five years after reaching state pension age. For each year of deferral, their pension will increase by seven and a half per cent.

In the Pensions Act 1995, we made provision to enhance this flexibility from 2010 by removing the limit on the number of years of deferral and increasing the incremental rate from 7.5 per cent. to 10 per cent. a year.

Social Fund

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were in receipt of a social fund grant or loan *(a)* in the year the social fund was introduced and *(b)* currently. [36980]

Mr. Roger Evans: In 1988–89, the first full year of the discretionary social fund, 153,000 non-repayable community care grants and 884,000 repayable loans were awarded.

In 1995–96, 275,000 non-repayable community care grants and 1,753,000 repayable loans were awarded.

Records held are based on the number of loans and grants awarded not the number of individuals to whom the awards were made. Some people may have been awarded more than one payment during the year.

Benefits

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of increasing current *(a)* earnings disregards and *(b)* capital limits to each benefit by (i) earnings and (ii) prices; and what would have been the cost at 1996 prices had these been uprated every year since their introduction. [34273]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is set out in the tables.

Table 1: Estimated costs of increasing earnings disregards

Change to earnings disregards	*Cost 1996–97 (£ millions)*
Increasing disregards by prices.	10
Increasing disregards by earnings.	10

Table 1: Estimated costs of increasing earnings disregards

Change to earnings disregards	*Cost 1996–97 (£ millions)*
Increasing disregards by prices since their introduction.	120
Increasing disregards by earnings since their introduction.	160

1. Estimates are modelled on the 1994 Quarterly Statistical Enquiry and the 1991/1992/1993 Family Expenditure Surveys uprated to 1996–97 levels of prices, benefits and earnings. Costs are rounded to the nearest £10 million.

2. Factors for uprating are based on the ROSSI and earnings indexes of the year prior to the year in question and have been applied to earnings disregard levels at April 1996.

3. Figures for Income Support contain unemployed cases who will be included in Jobseekers Allowance from October 1996. The effect on the Back to Work Bonus has not been estimated as the future behavioural response is very uncertain.

4. It has been assumed that no behavioural effects take place. The estimates which involve larger changes to the earnings disregard should in particular be treated with caution.

Table 2: Estimated cost of uprating capital limits since their introduction, or at the April 1996 uprating, at 1996–97 prices and benefit levels

Income related benefit Uprated by:	*Current year Prices or earnings*	*Since introduction Prices (ROSSI) £ million*	*Earnings £ million*
Income Support (including Jobseekers Allowance (Income Based))	*	60	70
Housing Benefit	*	50	70
Council Tax Benefit	*	*	*
Family Credit	*	30	40
Total estimated cost	*	140	190

1. Estimates are rounded to the nearest £10 million; * indicates a cost less than £5 million.

2. The lower and upper capital limits (except in residential care and nursing home cases) which apply in the calculation of income-related benefits are currently £3,000 and £8,000 respectively for Income Support and Family Credit, and £3,000 and £16,000 for Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Disability Working Allowance. The lower £3,000 limit was introduced in 1988. The upper limits of £8,000 for Income Support and £16,000 for Housing Benefit were increased in 1990. The Housing Benefit capital limits were applied to Disability Working Allowance and Council Tax Benefit when these benefits were introduced in 1992 and 1993 respectively.

3. Estimates are based upon data drawn from the 1991, 1992 and 1993 Family Expenditure Surveys, uprated to 1996–97 prices and benefit levels.

4. Estimates exclude cases in residential care and nursing homes.

5. Adjustments to these estimates are made using data drawn from the May 1995 Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry; the Family Credit database at July 1995; and the May 1994 Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit Management Information System.

6. It is not possible to give separate costs for Disability Working Allowance as there is insufficient information on likely claimants to effectively model their entitlement.

7. Figures for Income Support include Jobseekers's Allowance (Income-Based) from October 1996.

8. ROSSI is the Retail Prices Index excluding the rent, mortgage interest and local tax components, and is used to uprate income-related benefits.

9. After rounding the capital limits to the nearest £250, uprating by earnings or prices is the same for the one year uprating at April 1996.

10. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress the Benefits Agency in *(a)* Newham and *(b)* the United Kingdom has made in (i) identifying, (ii) contacting and (iii) recompensing asylum seekers affected by the Court of Appeal decision of 21 June. [35974]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

Immediately following the Court of Appeal ruling, Benefits Agency offices were advised to accept claims from those who gained entitlement to benefit for the period from 5 February. Given that the Court of Appeal ruling has received widespread media coverage, and this is an area in which advocacy and support groups are very active, it is likely that any action geared towards identifying affected cases would be largely redundant. Therefore, the Government do not believe it is necessary to take any special steps to identify those who may have gained entitlement following the court ruling.

Asylum seekers who would have been entitled during the period 5 February to 21 June will be aware that benefit can be obtained by making claim in respect of that period or seeking a review of a decision to disallow benefit. Arrears of benefit will be payable where appropriate in respect of claims and requests for review covering the period 5 February to 21 June.

Bate Case

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cases processed by the Benefits Agency have been affected by the decision of the House of Lords on the Bate case; in how many cases, suspended pending the outcome of the Bate appeal, payments have been made to claimants; if he will indicate the total amounts paid out to claimants affected by the Bate case; and what considerations led to the decision to make the payments. [36568]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Fraud

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the initiatives undertaken to reduce fraud in the periods *(a)* April 1979 to May 1983, *(b)* June 1983 to May 1987, *(c)* June 1987 to March 1992 and *(d)* April 1992 to date; and what was the amount of fraud detected for each period in constant prices. [36833]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested as details of initiatives undertaken prior to the creation of the Benefits Agency are not available. Such information as is available is as follows:

1991 to March 1992

Sector Fraud organisation established.

National Organised Fraud branch established.

Introduction of free anti-fraud training for local authority investigators.

Publication of anti-fraud, good practice guide for local authorities.

April 1992 to date

Five year Security Strategy;

Post Office Reward Scheme;

Electronic Stop Notice, barcoding of order books;

Deployment of mobile bar code scanners in Post Offices;

Generalised Matching Service—development of data matching across Benefits Agency computer systems to identify customer inconsistencies and incorrectness which are likely to result in excess benefit payments.

Audit Trail Analysis System—to provide a computer tool to deter, detect and report on patterns of fraud and abuse;

Spotlight on Benefit Cheats campaign—a series of co-ordinated anti-fraud drives, targeting specific towns or geographical areas;

Freephone Fraud Hotline Pilot;

Extra visits and other checks of new and existing claims to benefit;

Investigation of employers who collude with their employees to make false claims;

Trial examining standards of documentary proof of identify at point of encashment;

Prisoners Project—automation of the interface between the Prison Service and the Benefits Agency in England and Wales to eliminate fraud by persons impersonating convicted prisoners;

Benefit Reviews to measure the scale of benefit fraud and incorrectness on major social security benefits;

Joint Benefits Agency/Contributions Agency National Insurance Number Project;

Hole punching of order books by Post Offices prior to return to Benefits Agency office;

Secure delivery of order books to Post Offices;

Ultra Violet lamps for Post Office use;

Redesign of girocheques and order books, including greater security measures;

Secure delivery of girocheques;

Benefits Agency and Post Office Counters Limited (BA/POCL)—procuring via a Private Finance Initiative the automation of Post Office counters, introducing the benefit payment card;

Development and improvement of Management Information Systems;

Development and improvement of Case Work Management;

Fraud Investigation National Database;

Search by Address facility on Departmental Central Index;

Change Management Project—changing the culture of staff and customers so that security becomes everyone's responsibility;

Improved verification procedures;

Child Benefit—creation and maintenance of register of stolen birth certificates.

Operation Rattle—aimed at people receiving Child Benefit but who are no longer entitled to it owing to their absence from Great Britain

Joint Child Support Agency (CSA and Benefits Agency (BA) pilot initiative to a BA fraud officer in Plymouth CSA Centre.

CSA cases referred to BA where fraud is suspected, including cases where reduced benefit directions have been accepted.

CSA and BA closer working project to identify improved joint working practices to identify and prevent benefit fraud in the most cost effective way.

Various joint operations with other Departments (e.g. Customs and Excise) and other bodies (e.g. the police) to detect and deter fraud.

A BA official seconded full-time with the National Criminal Investigation Service (NCIS).

Appointment of a dedicated anti-fraud Minister (DSS).

Ministerial group on countering benefit fraud set up to oversee the development of measures to counter benefit fraud and insure effective co-ordination within Government and local authorities.

Counter Fraud Unit (currently being established in DSS) which will co-ordinate counter fraud activity within DSS and across Whitehall.

Rationalisation of the Departmental Central Index;

Benefits Agency review of internal fraud;

Private Sector Partnership—scoping work to test the suitability of future partnerships with the private sector. Currently considering fraud process efficiency and effectiveness.

Risk management—assessing and analysing risks so that they can be targeted and minimised;

A programme of activity to detect unreported changes of circumstances amongst customers residing in countries overseas;

Merger of the Benefits Agency and Employment Service fraud investigation services;

Introduction of the anti-fraud financial incentive scheme for local authorities.

Action against fraud roadshows—held in 20 different locations throughout the country to encourage local authority anti-fraud work.

Publication of the local authority Fraud Investigators' manual.

National fraud service level agreements between local authorities and both the Benefits Agency and Employment Service signed.

Challenge Funding scheme to encourage innovative and anti-fraud ideas (worth £8 million in 1996–97).

Revised anti-fraud financial incentives with higher rewards and stiffer penalties for poor performance authorities.

Introduction of the Housing Benefit Matching Service in July 1996 providing a data matching service for local authorities.

Establishment of organised Housing Benefit Fraud investigation team pilot.

Fraud savings are not available before 1986–87, information from 1986 is not available in the format requested. Fraud savings in 1995–96 prices for complete fiscal years are given in the table.

Figures for 1992–96 exclude the estimated savings achieved through the Security and Control Programme before 1995–96, which have yet to be finalised.

Annual fraud detection savings

Period	*1995–96 [1] Prices £ million*
1986–1987	221
1987–1992	1,947
1992–1996	2,757.6

[1] Prices have been uplifted using Retail Prices Index (RPI) mid year indices. The source for RPI data was "Economic Trends Annual Supplement—1996 Edition".

Doctors' Fees

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* full-time doctors and *(b)* fee-paid part-time doctors are employed by his Department; and what is the cost to his Department in each case of (i) the salaries or fees payable and (ii) the cost of administration. [36907]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table:

Location	Number of full time doctors	Number of fee paid part-time doctors	Salaries (£ million)	Fees (£ million)
DSS Headquarters	13	0	0.20	0
Benefits Agency	278	1,337	3.48	5.44
War Pensions Agency	37	20	0.50	0.07
Totals	328	1,357	4.18	5.51

1. Salaries and fees are for the period April to June 1996, and include National Insurance contributions, superannuation, etc.
2. Fee paid doctors are not employees, but independent contractors.
3. Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

Domestic Fuel Expenditure

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will introduce a system of regional heating premiums to means-tested benefits to reflect the regional disparity of heating costs. [37974]

Mr. Roger Evans: No.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people who have been disallowed incapacity benefit in the Coventry benefits district in each quarter since April 1995 *(a)* are currently signing on as unemployed, *(b)* are claiming unemployment benefits and *(c)* have started work. [37854]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

The number of people disallowed incapacity benefit who have successfully made claims to unemployment benefits and/or credits of national insurance in the Employment Service Coventry district is shown in the table:

Quarter ending	Number of cases
June 1995	11
September 1995	40
December 1995	54
March 1996	22
June 1996	111
Total in period	238

1. Of the total making a claim eight have been placed in work by an Employment Service adviser or through specialist PACT help. This figure does not include those who have found work by using the self service facility in Jobcentres.

Abbeyfield Society

Sir Michael Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to provide additional funds for the provision of places in registered extra care houses managed by the Abbeyfield Society; and if he will make a statement. [37892]

Mr. Roger Evans: Abbeyfield Society residents who were living in care homes on 31 March 1993 have preserved rights to the higher levels of income support for residential and nursing care. These levels are reviewed each year as part of the normal uprating exercise and were last increased in April 1996. Increases above the rate of inflation—Rossi index—were made to the limits for elderly and very dependent elderly people in residential care homes.

People who enter Abbeyfield extra care homes since April 1993 can seek assistance from local authorities with the cost of their care under the community care arrangements. Normal rates of income support including a residential allowance are available to such residents. These rates are similarly reviewed each year.

Foster Carers

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received from foster carers in respect of efficiency drives in his Department's freeline service. [38158]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Department has received one representation from the National Foster Care Association and two from Norwich and District Carers Forum.

Child Care

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to raise the age limit for receipt of family credit child care help. [37118]

Mr. Roger Evans: Proposals have been referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee which include extending eligibility for the child care disregard from the child's 11th birthday until the following September.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims in total have been made for the child care disregard in respect of (i) family credit and (ii) disability working allowance; and how many have been disallowed for *(a)* being in receipt of the maximum benefit, *(b)* child care not being provided by a registered provider, *(c)* the child being aged over 11 years and *(d)* being one of a couple where the partner was not incapacitated. [39048]

Mr. Evans: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Disabled People

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what further measures he is taking to assist disabled people; and if he will make a statement. [37413]

Mr. Burt: The Disability Discrimination Act, which received Royal Assent last year, is being phased in over a period of time to eliminate the unjustifiable discrimination that disabled people currently face in a number of areas, including employment and access to goods, facilities, services and premises. The employment rights and the first rights of access to goods, facilities, services and premises will come into force on 2 December this year.

Codes of practice on the new rights, together with guidance on the definition of disability in the Act, will be published shortly. These documents will help employers and service providers to understand and comply with the new rights and duties that the Act creates.

Upper Earnings Limit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the additional contribution yield from raising the upper earnings limit to £600. [38265]

Mr. Heald: Raising the present £455 upper earnings limit to £600 would increase national insurance contribution revenue for 1997–98 by an estimated £1.1 billion.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Disregards

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the costs of and *(b)* the numbers gaining from an increase in disregards from (i) £5 to £8.15, (ii) £10 to £16.40, (iii) £15 to £24.50, (iv) £25 to £34.10 in (1) income support, (2) housing benefit and (3) council tax benefit. [39044]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Benefit	*Total annual cost £ million*	*Gainers*
Income Support/Job Seekers Allowance (IR)	50	140,000
Housing Benefit	90	320,000
Council Tax Benefit	30	310,000

Notes:

1. Costs are rounded to the nearest £10 million. Gainers are rounded to the nearest 10 thousand. Behavioural effects are not taken into account. Figures for Income Support include increases in the cost of income-related Jobseeker's Allowance.
2. The number of gainers in each case refers both to those already receiving the benefit whose eligibility increases and those who will become eligible for the benefit as a result of the changes made to the earnings disregards in October.
3. The costs of increasing the Income Support/Jobseeker's Allowance disregards also includes the costs of increased entitlement to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit as a result of people floating onto Income Support because of the increased disregards. The figure for gainers only includes Income Support/Jobseeker's Allowance gainers.

Source:

1. Modelled using the 1991/1992/1993 Family Expenditure Surveys and the May 1994 Quarterly Statistical Enquiry uprated to 1996/97 levels of incomes, prices and benefits.

Benefit Statistics

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the numbers of *(a)* family credit and *(b)* disability working allowance claimants who are in receipt of the maximum benefit, broken down by (i) gender, (ii) marital status and (iii) whether self-employed or employed. [39110]

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the table.

Numbers of family credit and disability working allowance claimants receiving maximum awards

Family type	*Family credit*	*Disability working allowance*
All cases	193,000	8,076
Male main earner[1]	66,000	—
Female main earner[1]	127,000	—
Male claimant	—	4,862
Female claimant	—	3,214
Couples (married and unmarried)	88,000	3,057
Lone parents/single claimants	105,000	5,019
Self employed	44,000	1,577
Employed	149,000	6,499

Notes:

1. In Family Credit claims from couples, the claim is made by the mother in the family. Figures on gender are therefore provided by main earner.

Sources:

1. Family Credit 5 per cent. sample of awards (October 1995)—figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Disability Working Allowance 100 per cent. count (January 1996).

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many new claims were made during 1994–95 for *(a)* sickness benefit, *(b)* invalidity benefit, *(c)* severe disablement allowance and *(d)* income support where a disability premium is payable on incapacity grounds; [39114]

(2) how many new claims were made during 1995–96 for *(a)* short-term incapacity benefit, *(b)* long-term incapacity benefit, *(c)* severe disablement allowance and *(d)* income support where a disability premium is payable on incapacity grounds. [39113]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Benefit	*Claims received 1994–95*	*1995–96*
Sickness/Invalidity Benefit	[1]1,157,000	—
Incapacity Benefit	—	[1]1,054,000
Severe Disablement Allowance	[1]83,000	[1]96,000
Income Support with disability premium	[2]647,000	[2]737,000

Sources:

[1] Benefits Agency Central Data Unit. Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

[2] 5 per cent. sample from Income Support Computer System (ICIS). The figures represent numbers in receipt of disability premium at end of August 1994 and August 1995. It is not possible to identify separately those receiving disability premium on grounds of incapacity for work.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the numbers of people currently receiving *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax benefit by eligibility for (i) the carer premium, (ii) the lone parent premium and (iii) the disability premium. [39046]

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the tables.

Income support recipients by premium in Great Britain May 1995

Thousands

Premium type	*Income support recipients*
Carer	138
Disability	739
Lone parent	1,056

Source:
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry May 1995.
Note:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Housing benefit/council tax benefit recipients by premium, Great Britain—May 1995

Thousands

Premium type	*Housing benefit recipients*	*Council tax benefit recipients*
Carer	78	102
Disability	639	700
Lone parent	896	961

Source:
Housing Benefit Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample inquiries with and without income support taken at the end of May 1995.
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry May 1995.
Notes:
1 The figures given refer to the number of benefit units, which may be a single person or a couple.
2. The figures include overlaps because most people receive both housing benefit and council tax benefit.
3. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
4. Second adult rebate cases are not included.

Housing Benefit

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow can expect an answer to his letter of 18 June to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary about the Housing Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1996, S.I. 1996, No. 965. [39000]

Mr. Roger Evans: I replied to the hon. Member on Monday 22 July 1996.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much housing benefit was paid to residents of *(a)* York and *(b)* North Yorkshire in each year since 1979–80. [38939]

Mr. Evans: The available information is set out in the table:

£ millions

Year	*York*	*North Yorkshire*
1983–84	3.8	18.4
1984–85	4.4	20.9
1985–86	5.3	23.7
1986–87	5.6	25.6
1987–88	5.6	25.8
1988–89	5.7	26.2
1989–90	7.2	29.5
1990–91	9.2	32.8
1991–92	10.1	38.8
1992–93	14.1	56.4
1993–94	16.8	67.3
1994–95	19.5	78.5

Source:
DSS Finance and Planning Division and Department of the Environment.
Notes:
1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred thousand.
2. Information is only available from the introduction of the national scheme in 1983–84.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of families with children aged under 18 years received housing benefit in *(a)* York, *(b)* North Yorkshire, *(c)* Yorkshire and Humberside and *(d)* England in each year since 1979. [38941]

Mr. Evans: The available information is set out in the table:

Percentages of families with children aged under 18, who are in receipt of Housing Benefit for England

Year	*Percentage*
1990	13
1991	14
1992	17
1993	19
1994	19
1995	20

Source:
1. Housing Benefit Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample enquiry taken at May of each year given.
2. Child Benefit 1 per cent. sample enquiry at December 1994 and 4 per cent. sample enquiry at December for 1993, 1992, 1991, 1990 and 1989. Includes families with children aged only 18 and 19.
Note:
Information is not available for York, North Yorkshire and Yorkshire and Humberside and the relevant national data were not collected prior to 1990.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate in each case of *(a)* the cost of and *(b)* the numbers gaining from a reduction in the housing benefit taper to 50 per cent. to people in receipt of (i) the carer premium, (ii) the lone parent premium and (iii) the disability premium. [39045]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table.

The table shows, for each of the three groups, the estimated annual cost, the estimated number of current claimants who will gain from the change—gainers—and the estimated number of cases who will become newly entitled to and claim housing benefit as a result of the change—floaters on.

Group	*Cost (£ million)*	*Gainers (thousands)*	*Caseloads Floaters on (thousands)*
Disability premium	70	245	15
Lone parent premium	55	110	25
Carer premium	0	5	0
Total	125	355	40

1. Estimates are based on the Family Expenditure Surveys of 1991, 1992 and 1993, uprated to 1996/97 prices and benefit levels. Expenditure estimates are rounded to the nearest £5 million, and caseloads to the nearest 5,000.
2. The cost and caseload estimates for the disability premium and the lone parent premium includes some cases who are also in receipt of the Carer Premium.

Unemployment Credits

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average duration of a claim for *(a)* unemployment credits where no benefit is in payment and *(b)* incapacity credits where no benefit is in payment. [39112]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

The average duration of claims to unemployment benefit where the claimant was not in receipt of unemployment benefit or income support which were live on 8 February was 460 days (1 year and 3 months)[1]. Almost all of these claimants will have received national insurance credits.

The average duration of incapacity credits where no incapacity benefits were in payment in 1994–95 was 256 days (8 months)[2]. It is not known whether income support was in payment for any of the periods involved.

Sources:

[1] Five per cent. sample of unemployed claimants on 8 February 1996.

[1] One per cent. sample of all claims to sickness benefit made in Great Britain which terminated during 1994–95.

National Insurance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of average earnings the upper earnings limit for national insurance contributions has represented in each of the years *(a)* 1989–90, *(b)* 1990–91, *(c)* 1992–93, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [39108]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

Year	*Average weekly earnings (£)*[1]	*Weekly upper earnings limit (£)*	*Upper earnings limit as a percentage of average earnings*
1989–90	250	325	130
1990–91	274	350	128
1991–92	296	390	132
1992–93	312	405	130
1993–94	322	420	130
1994–95	332	430	130
1995–96	344	440	125
1996–97	357	455	127

[1] Average weekly earnings for all full-time workers whose pay was not affected by absence during the year. The figure for 1996–97 is an estimate.

Unemployment

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been paid out (i) in unemployment benefit and (ii) in other benefits to unemployed people in *(a)* York and *(b)* North Yorkshire in each year since 1979–80. [38934]

Mr. Roger Evans: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Pensions

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many female *(a)* divorced and *(b)* widowed pensioners there are in (i) York, (ii) North Yorkshire, (iii) Yorkshire and Humberside and (iv) England; and how many in each area currently receive a full state pension based on their husband's national insurance contributions record. [38935]

Mr. Heald: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Incapacity Credits

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the cost and *(b)* the numbers gaining if receipt of an incapacity credit where no benefit is in payment were to be included in the qualifying benefits for disability working allowance (i) during the eight weeks prior to claim, (ii) in the six months prior to claim and (iii) in the two years prior to claim. [39111]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: There are insufficient data on which to base reliable estimates.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, columns *411–12*, if he will break down each of the tables by gender and marital status. [39047]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the tables.

Number of people claiming benefit due to medical incapacity (Sickness Benefit and Incapacity Benefit) and receiving National Insurance credits only no benefit in payment: Great Britain—thousands

	Total claimants	*Men*	*Women*	*Married women*	*Other women*
1 April 1989[1]	157	70	87	33	54
31 March 1990[1]	205	95	110	40	70
30 March 1991[1]	262	126	137	53	84
4 April 1992[1]	320	160	160	61	100
3 April 1993[1]	387	201	185	75	110
2 April 1994[1]	440	233	207	83	124
12 April 1995[1]	512	277	235	92	143
29 February 1996[2]	580	320	260	n/a	n/a

Source:

1 per cent. sample of all claims to Sickness Benefit in Great Britain.

5 per cent. sample of claims to Incapacity Benefit, excluding a small number of cases not held on teh computer.

Note:

1. For incapacity only point in time information is available, relating to the end of the statistical year in question.

Number of unemployed claimants in receipt of National Insurance credits only: by gender and marital status in Great Britain

Thousands

		Males			Females		
	Total Claimants	*Total*	*Married*	*Single, divorced or widowed*	*Total*	*Married*	*Single, divorced or widowed*
May 1989	274	171	96	75	102	65	37
May 1990	220	141	69	73	78	45	34
May 1991	280	187	96	90	93	52	41
May 1992	313	211	116	96	102	59	43
May 1993	335	229	128	101	106	62	44
May 1994	281	192	120	72	89	52	38
May 1995	231	155	92	63	76	43	33
February 1996[1]	229	155	87	68	74	39	35

Notes

[1] February 1996 is the most recent data available.

[2] The above figures include a small number who will not receive credits, but can't be identified separately.

[3] For Unemployment Benefit, only point in time information is available, relating to the second Thursday of May in each of the years requested. The table below shows the number of unemployed claimants not receiving Unemployment Benefit nor Income Support by gender and marital status. Almost all of these will receive National Insurance (NI) credits.

Source:

5 per cent. sample of unemployed claimants taken on the second Thursday of the months shown.

Number of people receiving at least one credit for Invalid Care Allowance

Great Britain

Thousands

Financial year	*All*	*Men*	*Women*				
			All	*Married*	*Single*	*Divorced*	*Widowed*	*Unknown*
1988–89	116	21	95	77	7	4	6	1
1989–90	129	26	103	83	9	4	5	1
1990–91	143	30	112	91	11	5	5	1
1991–92	174	35	139	110	16	7	6	1
1992–93	210	45	165	130	21	8	6	1

1. The information for men aged between 60 and 64 years is available only for the numbers of people in receipt of at least on NI credit in the financial year shown.

Number of men, aged between 60 and 64 receiving at least one Autocredit

Great Britain

Thousands

Financial year	*Men*
1988–89	1,299
1989–90	1,310
1990–91	1,331
1991–92	1,348
1992–93	1,371

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

2. Figures 1992–93 are not complete as some returns may not have been received at the time of the extract.

Source:

1 per cent. sample of National Insurance Recording System (NIRS) taken at February 1994.

National Disability Council

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will appoint a deputy chairman to the National Disability Council. [39613]

Mr. Burt: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has appointed Martin Reavley, of Bass plc as the deputy chairman of the National Disability Council. Mr. Reavley's period of appointment will run from 9 July 1996 to 22 January 1999. Mr. Reavley has been a member of the council since its inception in January this year and has played an active role in its work.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what further studies he has made to measure the amount of benefit fraud; and if he will make a statement. [39680]

Mr. Heald: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, announced in July 1995 that he had instigated a series of benefit reviews across the major social security benefits to identify and quantify the level of fraud. Results of the reviews of income support, unemployment benefit, housing benefit and retirement pension have already been announced. A further review of invalid care allowance has now been completed.

This shows that the vast majority of customers are entitled to the benefit they are receiving.

However fraud has been found in 6.5 per cent. of cases representing annual overpayments of an estimated £37 million. The largest area of fraud uncovered was where recipients were failing to provide care to the disabled person.

As a result of these findings, we are introducing further measures to secure benefit payments for the future whilst ensuring the benefit remains accessible to those entitled to receive it.

Decision Making and Appeals

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will announce his proposals for improving social security decision making and appeals; and if he will make a statement. [39681]

Mr. Lilley: I am today publishing a consultation document setting out my objectives for improving this key area of social security administration as part of the change programme.

The proposals, on which I welcome comments, seek to remove the legal obstacles to efficient business processing whilst at the same time preserving individual rights to have decisions taken fairly and impartially in accordance with the facts and law. They will make it easier to improve accuracy and will be more cost effective to administer.

The paper also sets out my plans to develop more flexible arrangements for correcting decisions when necessary and also for ensuring that individuals take proper responsibility for providing relevant evidence to the Department. I have also made clear my intention to retain the right to independent appeal for those people whose dispute cannot better be resolved another way. Copies of the paper have been placed in the Library.

In addition, some changes to appeals procedures can be made as a step towards the longer term improvements. I am currently consulting the Council on Tribunals on these and, subject to that consultation, will lay regulations during recess, to take effect in the autumn. Copies of the letter to the Council on Tribunals, which sets out my proposals, have been placed in the Library.

Domestic Fuel Expenditure

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the amount of domestic fuel expenditure for each income decile expressed *(a)* in money terms and *(b)* as a percentage of total household expenditure in the latest year for which figures are available. [37901]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

Estimates of the average weekly household expenditure on domestic fuel by income decile groups are available for *(a)* in table 1.1 and for *(b)* in table 1.2 of "Family Spending: A report on the 1994–95 Family Expenditure Survey", a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Waste

Mr. Barry Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many applications for authorisations in respect of *(a)* municipal waste, *(b)* hazardous waste, *(c)* clinical waste and *(d)* animal and other incinerators have been (i) refused and (ii) allowed since Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution took over regulatory functions in respect of air quality; and if he will list the locations of those allowed and, of these, where are they situated. [37838]

Mr. Clappison: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution granted authorisations to:

(a) 19 municipal waste incinerators;

(b) 4 hazardous waste incinerators;

(c) 10 clinical waste incinerators; and

(d) 3 animal incinerators.

They also granted.

20 authorisations to in-house waste incinerators;

11 authorisations to sewage sludge incinerators; and

7 authorisations to drum incinerators.

No applications for authorisation from incinerators were refused by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

The names and addresses of the incinerators have been placed in the Library of the House.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is *(a)* the average cost and *(b)* the lowest cost for the installation of loft insulation, approved under the home energy efficiency scheme. [37895]

Mr. Clappison: The present average grant towards the cost of loft insulation under the home energy efficiency scheme is £189, and the lowest recorded is £87.49.

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many grants at 25 per cent. have been paid under the home energy efficiency scheme; and if he will make a statement. [37899]

Mr. Clappison: One hundred and twenty nine such grants had been paid by 30 June 1996.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources he plans to make available to local authorities to enable them to implement recommendations arising from reports produced under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995. [38050]

Mr. Clappison: None specifically, since those measures which are for direct implementation by local authorities fall within their existing powers and duties as housing authorities. Energy efficiency will continue to be one of the factors taken into account in considering allocations to local authorities in England under the housing investment programme. Housing finance in Scotland, in Wales and in Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the respective Secretaries of State. In the case of the majority of the housing stock, implementation will be for third parties, such as landlords and homeowners, and the role of the local authority will be to inform, educate and motivate. Many authorities already take steps to provide information and encourage residents to use energy more efficiently in their homes.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional resources he plans to make available to the home energy efficiency scheme to match additional measures added to the scheme as a result of the current consultation process. [38052]

Mr. Clappison: The allocation for the home energy efficiency scheme is decided each year in the light of the priorities at that time and the overall resources available for all programmes. No decisions have yet been taken on

the proposals contained in the consultation paper published earlier this year on the future of this successful and well-regarded scheme.

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is *(a)* the average cost and *(b)* the lowest cost for the installation of draught-proofing, approved under the home energy efficiency scheme. [37898]

Mr. Clappison: The present average grant towards the cost of draught-proofing under the home energy efficiency scheme is £116, and the lowest recorded is £45.33.

Radon Gas

Sir Peter Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what categories of information are provided by the National Radiological Protection Board to local authorities to assist them in identifying and advising individual households which may be at risk from high levels of radon gas; and what category of information on radon-affected homes is considered by the board to be confidential and not made available to local authorities. [38086]

Mr. Clappison: Participation in the radon measurement programme, administered by the National Radiological Protection Board on behalf of the Department of the Environment, is voluntary. Householders who participate in this Government-funded programme are given categorical assurances that the results for their homes will be confidential to them. The NRPB is therefore not free to release individual results to any other party. However, to assist local authorities, aggregated data are routinely provided to each local authority within whose area measurements have been made. These data are given for areas defined down to the level of postcode sectors.

Urban Initiative

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress towards agreement between Her Majesty's Government and the European Commission on the terms on which funds for the Urban initiative can be made available to neighbourhoods in England. [37967]

Sir Paul Beresford: We are close to finalising the administrative arrangements with the European Commission for the Urban Community initiative. The programmes for those neighbourhoods to receive funding in England, Scotland and Wales will commence as soon as they have been formally adopted by the Commission.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by region the total amount of *(a)* useable capital receipts and *(b)* receipts set aside as provision for credit liability, held by each local authority in England at 31 March. [38015]

Mr. Curry: A list by region of the amounts of accumulated usable capital receipts and provision for credit liabilities held by each English local authority at 31 March 1995 has been placed in the Library of the House. The provision for credit liabilities includes amounts set aside from revenue as well as capital receipts. Separate figures are not available.

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the delay in consolidating regulations for local authority capital expenditure and finance. [38278]

Sir Paul Beresford: We expect to issue draft consolidated regulations for consultation by October.

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what were the needs assessments for local government expressed through the local government grant systems for *(a)* Westminster city council and *(b)* Liverpool city council in each year since 1979; [38279]

(2) if he will list for each authority for each year from 1979–80 to 1996–97 the amount that each was deemed to need to spend in (i) cash and (ii) real terms for the purposes of distributing rate support grant; to what extent the figures are comparable, taking account of *(a)* changes in functions of local authorities, *(b)* abolition of the Greater London council, the Inner London education authority and metropolitan counties, *(c)* the local government review, *(d)* changed arrangements for the assessment of needs, *(e)* changed arrangements for the payment of the needs element of rate support grant and *(f)* changed precepting arrangements; and if he will list for each authority on a comparable basis the assessed needs in each year on the basis of the percentage of total local government spending that each authority's needs represents and of the amount of assessed needs per head of population. [38280]

Sir Paul Beresford: Information on standard spending assessments from 1990–91 onwards in cash and in real terms has been placed in the Library. The information includes, for 1992–93 and later years, figures recalculated so as to be comparable to those for the year immediately following. These adjusted figures take account of changes in function and geographical responsibility, but not changes in data, methodology or the national totals for each element of the SSAs.

The figures in real terms are based on the gross domestic product deflator.

Information has also been provided as a percentage of the total for England and as an amount per head for the figures in cash terms.

Data on grant-related expenditure assessments, in cash and in real terms, covering the period 1981–82 to 1989–90, will be placed in the Library shortly.

I will write to the hon. Member shortly concerning data for the years before 1981–82.

Street Litter (Westminster)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will discuss with Westminster city council street litter around the Palace of Westminster in the absence of bins. [38085]

Mr. Clappison: I understand that Westminster city council recognises the particular pressure placed upon the area around the Palace of Westminster because of the large number of visitors and the absence of bins. It has already discussed with its contractor the need for additional resources at this time of year.

The city council requires its contractor to clean the area to a higher standard and over a longer period than is required in the statutory code of practice issued under part IV of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Furthermore, where complaints of litter in this area are received, it aims to deal with the problem within one hour.

Rents (Wigan)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of whether the senior rent officer at Wigan is following the correct statutory procedure in determining private sector rent levels for housing benefits. [38021]

Mr. Curry: None. Rent officers are independent statutory officers, appointed by the proper officer of the local authority in accordance with a statutory scheme agreed with the Secretary of State for the Environment. The Secretary of State has specified in the Rent Officers (Additional Functions) Order 1995, as amended, the criteria that rent officers must follow in determining rents for housing benefit purposes. Rent officers are not accountable to the Secretary of State for their decisions. They are accountable through the chief rent officer to the proper officer on matter of performance and conduct.

Homelessness

Mr. Brian David Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are currently registered as homeless with local housing authorities. [38476]

Mr. Clappison: Summary information on households for which local authorities in England accept responsibility to secure accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985 is published in a quarterly information bulletin—"Households found accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act 1985: England". Copies of the bulletin, the latest of which provides statistics for the first quarter of 1996, are in the Library.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* households, *(b)* pensioners and *(c)* families with children (i) were presented and (ii) were accepted as homeless in (1) York, (2) North Yorkshire, (3) Yorkshire and Humberside and (4) England in each year since 1979. [38998]

Mr. Clappison: The available data on households dealt with under the homelessness provisions of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 and the Housing Act 1985 are set out in the tables. Other than those given for York, the figures for acceptances of households with children or a vulnerable household member could be provided only at disproportionate cost for years before 1991.

York

	Applications/ enquiries[1]	*Households accepted for re-housing*		
		Total	*Of which households with: Vulnerable member due to old age*	*Children*
1979	n/a	125	n/a	n/a
1980	n/a	352	n/a	n/a
1981	632	503	4	310
1982	464	320	6	178
1983	355	212	5	128
1984	357	204	4	100
1985	479	264	5	138
1986	597	313	3	180
1987	[2]330	[2]159	[2]2	[2]104
1988	414	227	3	132
1989	457	242	8	132
1990	623	349	4	211
1991	[2]750	230	[2]2	[3]103
1992	1,824	168	10	112
1993	1,234	137	6	80
1994	1,264	103	2	53
1995	1,173	120	2	64

n/a = not available.

North Yorkshire[1]

	Households accepted for re-housing		
	Total	*Of which households with: Vulnerable member due to old age*	*Children*
1979	640	—	—
1980	850	—	—
1981	1,020	—	—
1982	810	—	—
1983	740	—	—
1984	740	—	—
1985	730	—	—
1986	870	—	—
1987	760	—	—
1988	870	—	—
1989	1,180	—	—
1990	1,350	—	—
1991	1,180	[4]70	[4]580
1992	990	70	720
1993	870	40	580
1994	870	30	570
1995	820	30	550

Yorkshire and Humberside

	Households accepted for re-housing		
	Total	*Of which households with: Vulnerable member due to old age*	*Children*
1979	4,590	—	—
1980	5,360	—	—
1981	5,740	—	—
1982	5,930	—	—
1983	5,740	—	—
1984	5,820	—	—
1985	7,650	—	—
1986	8,590	—	—
1987	8,920	—	—
1988	9,920	—	—
1989	11,520	—	—
1990	13,800	—	—

Yorkshire and Humberside

	Households accepted for re-housing		
	Total	*Of which households with:*	
		Vulnerable member due to old age	*Children*
1991	13,080	[4]340	[4]5,220
1992	14,820	500	8,900
1993	13,650	480	8,150
1994	11,330	370	5,400
1995	10,210	370	5,400

England

	Households accepted for re-housing		
	Total	*Of which households with:*	
		Vulnerable member due to old age	*Children*[2]
1979	55,530	—	—
1980	60,400	—	—
1981	66,990	—	—
1982	71,620	—	—
1983	75,470	—	—
1984	80,500	—	—
1985	91,010	—	—
1986	100,490	—	—
1987	109,170	—	—
1988	113,770	—	—
1989	122,180	—	—
1990	140,350	6,570	84,120
1991	144,780	5,860	88,950
1992	142,890	6,230	85,300
1993	132,380	5,920	76,390
1994	122,460	6,050	68,620
1995	120,810	5,950	67,100

[1] The data colleced from authorities have, since April 1991, included a request for the number of applications or enquiries first recorded during the quarter. The data provided are not reported on a consistent basis across authorities as they reflect differing local administrative practices and cannot, therefore, be used to produce national or regional totals of applications/inquiries. The available figures prior to April 1991 are not comparable with later data as they have a narrower coverage—they cover only the number of cases in which inquiries carried out by the authority were completed during the year.

[2] Data for 3 quarters only.

[3] Data for 2 quarters only.

[4] April to December only.

Area Costs Adjustment

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what proposals he has to take into account local wage rates in respect of area costs adjustment allocation; [38480]

(2) what research his Department has commissioned into the operation of the area costs adjustment; [38478]

(3) what representations he has received in respect of the area costs adjustment; [38481]

(4) what plans he has to review the criteria for the area costs adjustment. [38479]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend set up an independent review of the area cost adjustment, chaired by Professor Elliott of the university of Aberdeen. The review reported earlier this month. The findings of the review had the benefit of substantial research commissioned to the specifications of the review team, together with research submitted in representations from local authority associations and groupings.

The review recommends that the area cost adjustment should be based on the results of an analysis of the reasons for the variations in earnings reported by the labour force survey. The analysis distinguishes the extent to which variations are accounted for by geographical location, as distinct from other factors.

I have received a number of representations about the results of the review, both asking that its findings be implemented, and asking that they be rejected.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sites of special scientific interest have been lost or damaged since 1981. [38316]

Mr. Clappison: Statistical information on damage to SSSIs in Great Britain is set out in the annual reports of the former Nature Conservancy Council. Since 1 April 1991 similar details for England, Scotland and Wales are contained in the annual reports of the country agencies and, for Great Britain, in that of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. Copies of annual reports are in the Library.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sites of special scientific interest have been compulsory purchased using a nature conservation order since 1981. [38317]

Mr. Clappison: None. The Secretary of State confirmed one such compulsory purchase order over land within Somerset, but following further discussions with the landowner the compulsory purchase order was not implemented.

Asbestos Cement Roof Slates

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he collates regarding the use of asbestos cement roof slates with special reference to *(a)* their current availability and commercial use, *(b)* the use of a permanent form of marking of the slates as containing asbestos and *(c)* the source of production; and if he will make a statement. [38809]

Mr. Clappison: No information on the current availability, commercial use or source of production of asbestos cement roof slates is collated by my Department. However, it is estimated that asbestos cement products, including roof slates and profiled sheeting, account for 40 per cent. of the asbestos fibre currently used in the UK. The marking of asbestos products is covered by the Asbestos Products (Safety) Regulations 1985, as amended. These regulations require that asbestos and all products containing the mineral should be marked as such using a specified label. The label may be printed directly on the product, attached to it or attached to its packaging.

Council Houses

Mr. Brian David Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses have been *(a)* sold and *(b)* built in the last 10 years. [38475]

Mr. Clappison: Between January 1986 and December 1995, almost 810,000 local authority and new town homes were sold for owner-occupation in England. In addition, there were more than 230,000 sales to housing associations and other types of ownership.

It is estimated that 94,000 dwellings were built by local authorities and new towns in England during this period.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the last 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39145]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government recognise the crucial role played by small firms in the UK economy and aim to help them by providing sound economic conditions—keeping inflation and interest rates low; reducing legislative administration and taxation burdens; and, where appropriate, provide direct assistance in the form of specialist advice and support and easing access to finance.

My Department assists the development of small businesses through sponsorship of the construction industry and the Rural Development Commission and by its responsibility for regeneration, energy efficiency and environmental technology. In other areas, such as planning, environmental protection, and health and safety our concern is to ensure that regulation does not impose unnecessary burdens on business. Further details of my Department's activities in these areas can be found in "Your Business Matters: The Government's Response", the third competitiveness White Paper and the Department of the Environment's annual report; these documents are available in the House of Commons Library.

Housing Associations

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give directions to the Housing Corporation to ensure that in the operation of sections 4 and 5, of schedule 1 to the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, or any amending legislation, housing associations do not discriminate on the grounds of nationality, race or colour. [38911]

Mr. Clappison: We shall shortly be discussing with the Housing Corporation the guidance to be issued to housing associations about access to accommodation. We envisage that the guidance will continue to expect associations to comply with, and endorse, the Commission for Racial Equality's code of practice in rented housing. We also expect that guidance will cover the issue of discrimination when dealing with approaches from people whom they consider may be asylum seekers. Housing associations will be expected to comply with the corporation's guidance.

Link Road Inquiry (Leicester)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional time Leicestershire county council asked for to enable it to respond to the exchange land problem raised by the Secretary of State in the Leicester A46–A47 link road public inquiry. [38990]

Sir Paul Beresford: None.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the reduction in carbon dioxide emissions from private cars as a result of increasing fuel duty by 5 per cent. in real terms over the next 10 years. [38797]

Mr. Clappison: The Government's long-term strategy of increasing road fuel duties by an average of at least 5 per cent. each year in real terms forms part of the United Kingdom's climate change programme and is expected to deliver annual savings of about 3 million tonnes of carbon by 2000 as a result of lower carbon dioxide emissions from all road transport. That is equivalent to about 2 per cent. of total 1990 UK carbon dioxide emissions. Estimates of the carbon savings attributable to private cars and forecasts beyond 2000 are not available.

English Partnerships

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when English Partnerships will publish its annual report and accounts for 1995–96. [38843]

Mr. Curry: I am today laying copies of English Partnerships' annual report and accounts in the House and copies will also be available in the Library.

Rents

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average rent paid for a *(a)* council, *(b)* housing association and *(c)* privately rented home in (i) York and (ii) England in each year since 1979 in (1) cash terms and (2) current prices. [38927]

Mr. Clappison: the available information is given in the tables.

In the private rented sector, comprehensive information on average rents is not available for individual local authority districts. Such information was first collected for housing associations in 1992.

(i) Average rents in York, 1983–84 to 1994–95
(1) Cash

£ per week

Financial year	*:Local authority rents*	*Year*[1]	*Housing association rents*
1983–84	10.19	—	—
1984–85	10.54	—	—
1985–86	11.32	—	—
1986–87	11.89	—	—
1987–88	13.28	—	—
1988–89	14.16	—	—
1989–90	15.23	—	—
1990–91	21.01	—	—
1991–92	23.36	1992	28.08
1992–93	26.52	1993	31.45
1993–94	29.52	1994	34.94
1994–95	32.42	1995	37.03

(2) Current prices (1994–95 prices)[2]

£ per week

Financial year	*Local authority rents*	*Year*[1]	*Housing association rents*
1983–84	17.51	—	—
1984–85	17.24	—	—
1985–86	17.56	—	—
1986–87	17.90	—	—
1987–88	18.98	—	—
1988–89	18.97	—	—
1989–90	19.07	—	—
1990–91	24.36	—	—
1991–92	25.49	1992	30.64
1992–93	27.81	1993	32.98
1993–94	30.07	1994	35.60
1994–95	32.42	1995	37.03

[1] Housing association rents are at 31 March. First collected by the Housing Corporation 31 March 1992.

[2] Real terms figures are cash figures adjusted for inflation as measured by the GDP market prices deflator.

(ii) Average rents in England, 1979–1980 to 1994–95

(1) Cash

£ per week

Financial year	*Local authority rents*	*Calendar year*[1]	*Housing association rents*[2]	*Private sector rents*[2]
1979–80	6.49	1979	n/a	n/a
1980–81	8.19	1980	n/a	n/a
1981–82	11.53	1981	n/a	n/a
1982–83	13.58	1982	n/a	n/a
1983–84	14.03	1983	n/a	n/a
1984–85	14.79	1984	16	16
1985–86	15.63	1985	17	18
1986–87	16.48	1986	20	23
1987–88	17.40	1987	24	26
1988–89	19.01	1988	23	29
1989–90	20.86	1989	22	31
1990–91	23.92	1990	27	43
1991–92	27.59	1991	30	51
1992–93	30.84	1992	37	55
1993–94	33.70	1993	38	68
1994–95	35.79	1994–95	43	69

[1] The Family Expenditure Survey changed from a calendar to a financial year basis in 1994.

[2] These figures are from the Family Expenditure Survey and are subject to sampling variability. They cover all types of tenancy, i.e. both assured and non-assured tenancies.

(2) Current prices (1994–95 prices)[1]

£ per week

Financial year	*Local authority rents*	*Calendar year*[2]	*Housing association rents*[3]	*Private sector rents*[3]
1979–80	16.22	1979	n/a	n/a
1980–81	17.30	1980	n/a	n/a
1981–82	22.20	1981	n/a	n/a
1982–83	24.41	1982	n/a	n/a
1983–84	24.10	1983	n/a	n/a
1984–85	24.19	1984	26	27
1985–86	24.24	1985	26	29
1986–87	24.81	1986	31	34
1987–88	24.87	1987	35	38
1988–89	25.47	1988	32	40
1989–90	26.12	1989	29	40
1990–91	27.73	1990	32	50
1991–92	30.10	1991	33	57
1992–93	32.34	1992	39	58
1993–94	34.33	1993	39	69
1994–95	35.79	1994–95	43	69

[1] Real terms figures are cash figures adjusted for inflation as measured by the GDP market prices deflator.

[2] The Family Expenditure Survey changed from a calendar to a financial year basis in 1994.

[3] These figures are from the Family Expenditure Survey and are subject to sampling variability. They over all types of tenancy, i.e. both assured and non-assured tenancies.

Standard Spending Assessment (Tyne and Wear)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the standard spending assessment for 1996–97 in pounds per head for metropolitan councils within Tyne and Wear. [39065]

Sir Paul Beresford: The standard spending assessments for 1996–97 were as follows:

	£
Gateshead	780.77
Newcastle upon Tyne	821.19
North Tyneside	749.40
South Tyneside	800.78
Sunderland	793.31
Northumbria Police Authority	65.32
Tyne and Wear Fire and Civil Defence Authority	31.75

Water Supplies

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what volume of water was *(a)* supplied to customers and *(b)* lost through evaporation and leakage by each of the privatised water companies in each year since privatisation; and if he will show *(b)* as a percentage of *(a)*. [38940]

Mr. Clappison: Water delivered and leakage levels for each company are given in the Office of Water Services' reports on the cost of water delivered and sewage collected. Copies of these reports are in the House Library. Figures prior to 1992–93 are not available on a comparable basis.

Estimates of the volume of public water supplied by each water service company prior to 1992—93 are available from the Water Services Association.

Empty Housing

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* Government, *(b)* housing association and *(c)* council-owned homes there were in (i) York, (ii) North Yorkshire, (iii) Yorkshire and Humberside and (iv) England; and what percentage of these houses were empty, on 1 April of each year since 1979. [38999]

Mr. Clappison: I will write to the hon. Member.

Correspondence

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the appeals branch of the local government pensions unit intends to reply to correspondence from Mrs. J. E. Lambert of 13 Finchfield close, Eaglescliffe, Stockton-on-Tees TS16 0EY. [39028]

Sir Paul Beresford: A reply, explaining that the Department was still awaiting information from Middlesbrough borough council, was sent to Mrs. Lambert on 3 July in response to her letter of 30 June.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reports or advice he received from the Audit Commission in relation to his Department's proposals for a new framework for compulsory competitive tendering. [38949]

Sir Paul Beresford: The proposals to change the CCT framework took account of discussions between officials in my Department and the Audit Commission about the interpretation of credits and allowances in CCT calculations. Since these proposals were published, we have received technical comments from Audit Commission officials.

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the extent to which officials in his Department, responsible for developing policy towards compulsory competitive tendering, visit local authorities to determine episodes of *(a)* good and *(b)* bad practices; and if he will make a statement on the value of national legislation and regulation to deal with weaknesses in some local authorities. [38950]

Sir Paul Beresford: In the past 12 months, the relevant officials have made approximately 50 visits to local authorities to discuss compulsory competitive tendering matters, including good and bad practice. In addition, officials speak at and/or attend conferences and seminars on CCT which are designed for local authority staff.

Overall, CCT legislation has proved effective in promoting greater efficiency in the provision of local authority services. The framework includes enforcement powers for the Secretary of State to use against authorities that act in an anti-competitive way and/or where an in-house team fails to meet prescribed financial targets.

We have no plans to change the enforcement provisions, but we are currently considering whether changes need to be made to the CCT framework for professional services and housing management.

Aircraft Investment

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the names of the chairman and directors of the Arrowcroft Investment Co. [39175]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information that the hon. Member requires is not held by the Department of the Environment.

Pneumoconiosis and Asbestosis Claims

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cases were settled under the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers Compensation) (Payment of Claims) Amendment Regulations in the last year for which figures are available; of those how many payments were for pneumoconiosis and how many were for asbestosis; what was the average age of those claimants who received a payment; and what was the average payment made. [38972]

Sir Paul Beresford: In 1995–96, 363 cases were settled under the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) Amendment Regulations. Twenty-five per cent. of payments were for pneumoconiosis as defined in the Social Security Act 1975, which includes asbestosis. The average age of all claimants who received payments under the Act was 64 years and the average payment of all claimants who received a payment under the Act was £11,430.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff are assumed in his Department's budget, employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, *(a)* to work on the press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39365]

Sir Paul Beresford: As at 1 July, there are 30 information officers—including one part time—employed by the Department of the Environment. All deal with a full range of information services including publicity, press and media handling.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff were employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94. [39417]

Sir Paul Beresford: The numbers of staff employed as Information Officers by the Department of the Environment as at 31 March for each of the years in question were:

1995–96: 32 (including 1 part time and 1 employed by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution).

1994–95: 3 (including 1 employed by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution).

1993–94: 30.

These staff dealt with a full range of information services including publicity, press and media handling.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost budgeted for staff, employed full time or part time, to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39442]

Sir Paul Beresford: For 1996–97, the salary budget for staff employed as information officers is £1,039,145.00. This figure relates to 32.5 complemented posts for the year. However, as at 1 July the actual staff in post was 30—which includes one part time.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost of staff employed full time or part time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work on the press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94. [39433]

Sir Paul Beresford: The outturn salary costs for staff employed as information officers by the Department of the Environment for the years in question were:

1995–96: £976,477.00

1994–95: £890,056.00

1993–94: £902,002.00.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media. [39351]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department does not employ consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media handling. This work is carried out by in-house information staff.

Pre- and post-campaign research is carried out by external consultants in order to ensure value for money in our publicity campaigns. This research is funded as an integral part of a campaign and is not the subject of a separate budget.

As a supplementary exercise, however a consultancy budget of £20,000 has been set aside in 1996–97 so that the various publicity and market research techniques available can be evaluated.

Non-toxic Gunshot

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if safe and effective non-toxic shotgun cartridges are available for use over wetland sites; what assessment he has made of the extent to which the voluntary phase-out of lead gunshot in wetlands is being adhered to; and if he will make a statement. [38794]

Mr. Clappison: A number of non-toxic alternatives to lead shot are available, many of which have been tested at a ballistic testing facility partly funded by this Department. The Department is currently funding two relevant research projects, one aimed at assessing the sales of non-toxic shot and the other to monitor the levels of lead ingestion in waterfowl.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are being taken to provide shotgun licence holders, with special reference to wildfowlers, with guidance on the safety and efficacy of non-toxic gunshot before the next wildfowling season. [38792]

Mr. Clappison: Guidelines on the use of non-toxic shot in 12 bore shotguns are currently being prepared.

Pleasure Boat Licensing

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to prevent duplication of pleasure boat licensing by public authorities on the same inland waterways. [39636]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I am today issuing a consultation paper. This sets out the Government's proposal to amend the law to provide that no licence from a local authority under section 94 of the Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1970, as amended, is required in respect of pleasure craft on any waterway owned or managed by British Waterways or the Environment Agency. The legislative change would be made by an order under section 1 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994.

European Spatial Development Perspective

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the current position on the development of the European spatial development perspective. [39642]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Committee for Spatial Development continues to work, under the direction of informal meetings of European Planning Ministers, on collecting and analysing the basic information required for the development of an ESDP. This will be a non-binding document prepared jointly by member states and the European Commission. It is intended to identify areas of Europe facing similar planning challenges and raise awareness of the European scale influences at work. The Netherlands' Minister has indicated that the process of drafting the document will start during its presidency next year. Bearing in mind the likely significance of any ESDP at local government level, consultation will be carried out once a draft document is available. In the Committee for Spatial Development, the UK continues to stress the importance of the informal intergovernmental approach and the non-binding nature of the ESDP.

Green Belt (School Extensions)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if planning policy guidance note 2 rules out any extensions to schools in green belts; and if development plans may include policies for them. [39643]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: PPG2 does not rule out the extension of schools located in green belts if other considerations clearly outweigh the harm to the green belt, or if the development is for purposes specified in PPG2 such as essential facilities for outdoor sport.

Very special circumstances are needed to justify development for purposes not specified in PPG2. Development plan policies should ensure that any application for such development would not be in accord with the plan. The plan's reasoned justification might, however, indicate the factors the local planning authority would take into account in considering an application for a school extension for purposes not specified in PPG2.

An application would also need to be considered against other relevant planning policies, for example on the visual amenities of the green belt (see PPG2) and on transport (see PPG13). The suitable re-use of existing building would not require very special circumstances.

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 grants limited rights to erect small buildings in school grounds without the need to apply for planning permission.

Special Waste Regulations 1996

Mr. Lord: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made with the implementation of the Special Waste Regulations 1996. [39663]

Mr. Clappison: The Special Waste Regulations were made on 28 March 1996 and will come into effect on 1 September 1996. The regulations, which implement the EC hazardous waste directive—91/689/EEC—update provisions for supervising movements of the most difficult and dangerous waste and controlling its

management and disposal. In particular, the regulations provide for movements of such waste to be pre-notified to the environment agencies and to be tracked by a system of consignment notes. Guidance in the form of a circular to the environment agencies and local authorities was published on 13 June.

Since the regulations were made, some technical problems have come to light and we plan to make amending regulations in order to correct these before the regulations enter into force. We hope to make amending regulations by the end of the month and to lay them before Parliament shortly thereafter.

These are complex regulations and I believe that these changes will be welcomed by industry and regulators alike for the clarification and improvements which they will bring to the functioning of the new system.

In addition to these technical changes, we have looked again at the exclusion which applies to household waste. The definition of household waste does not include waste oils, clinical waste or asbestos. We intend to make an amendment which will ensure that waste oils, and clinical waste from households are not subject to the regulations. These changes will ensure that the regulations do not interfere with arrangements for separate collections of clinical waste from domestic properties nor add to their cost.

The definition of household waste includes waste from premises forming part of educational establishments, and hospitals. We plan to make an amendment to clarify that the exemption will not apply to waste from laboratories or to non domestic hospital waste. However, this amendment will not imply that all waste from such sources will be special waste.

The technical changes will include an amendment to the schedule which has to be completed for movements of special waste collected during a daily round of consignments—referred to as a carrier's round. An amendment will clarify that a single consignment note and schedule can be used for more than one type of waste for which a single fee will be charged for each such round.

The changes will also clarify and update cross references to the Chemicals (Hazard Information and Packaging) Regulations—SI 1994/3247—which are intended to assist industry in determining whether waste is special. They will introduce a simplified procedure for waste which is consigned by pipeline. Other amendments will set a time limit of two months on the payment of fees to the environment agencies, and will set the penalty for failure to pay at a level 3 fine.

Household Projections

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to publish a discussion paper on the household projections. [39664]

Mr. Gummer: I have been delighted by the substantial response to the widened debate I initiated at Brighton in June and which my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration and my hon. Friend the Minister for Planning, Construction and Energy Efficiency have been taking forward subsequently. I now wish to give careful consideration to the views and ideas that have emerged and to reflect these in the discussion paper. The paper and ensuing debate would also benefit from the outcome of a number of important research projects, being carried out both by this Department and by others, which have a significant bearing on this issue and some of which will not be complete or ready for consideration until the autumn. I therefore propose to publish the paper along with the main findings of the relevant research after Parliament resumes later this year.

Government Office for Yorkshire and Humberside

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for a change in the Government office for Yorkshire and Humberside following the abolition of Humberside county council. [39669]

Mr. Curry: From 1 October the Government office will become "The Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber" to reflect the recent changes in local government structure. The regional boundaries will be unchanged and the new unitary authority areas of North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire will continue to be part of the Yorkshire and Humber region, reflecting the concerns of many interests in both private and public sectors that the Humber estuary and its hinterland is a key part of the economic fabric of the wider region.

Leghold Traps

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government will respond to the eighth report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Leghold Traps, HL 73 of Session 1995–96. [39679]

Mr. Gummer: The Government have today published their response to the Select Committee and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Trade Effluent Treatment Plants

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the requirements on operators of trade effluent treatment plants to obtain a waste management licence. [39724]

Mr. Clappison: On 25 July 1995, the Government announced the extension to 31 March 1996 of a transitional exemption from waste management licensing for certain operations which involve the biological or physio-chemical treatment of waste. In so doing, we confirmed that we would be prepared to consider whether a case could be made for some waste treatment plant to be exempted from licensing under article 11 of the amended EC framework directive on waste, and we invited representations from anyone with an interest in such plant.

Following that announcement, the Government decided that it would be appropriate also to review the application of article 2 of the framework directive. The transitional arrangements were therefore extended to 30 September 1996 in order to enable this to be done. We are now in a position to announce our conclusions.

The Government's conclusions are that the requirements of the framework directive on waste do not apply:

(a) to discharges of effluent which are covered by national legislation transposing the requirements of the urban waste water treatment directive; or

(b) to discharges of effluent which are covered by national rules in force at the time of the framework directive's adoption in March 1991 which lay down regimes for discharges of effluent which provide an effective means of pursuing the aims of the directive, and which provide for rules and authorisations of the kind provided for in the urban waste water treatment directive. In the Government's view, national rules of this kind are discharge consents under chapter II of part III of the Water Resources Act 1991 or part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 in Scotland (pollution of controlled waters); and consents under chapter III of part IV of the Water Industry Act 1991 (consent for discharge of trade effluent into a public sewer).

It follows that, where effluent is being subjected to biological or physio-chemical treatment in circumstances where these criteria are met, the operation of the treatment plant does not require a waste management licence under part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Conservation Sites

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the Lappel bank judgment at the European Court of Justice on other development proposals on sites of conservation interest excluded from special protection areas on economic grounds; if he will list all such sites and proposals in the United Kingdom and their status; and if he will make a statement. [37986]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The European Court of Justice's judgment has clarified that member states are not permitted to take account of economic requirements in classifying special protection areas under article 4(1) and 4(2) of Council directive 79/409 and in defining their boundaries. The specific case of Lappel bank is referred back to the House of Lords.

The judgment effectively means that the proposals for economic development must be considered after designation, in the terms of article 6 of the habitats directive.

There are no other unimplemented development proposals for which permission has been granted on sites of conservation interest excluded from special protection areas on economic grounds.

Water Metering

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the water companies which maintain a policy of compulsory metering of properties built since 1989. [38462]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Most water companies have a policy of metering new properties built since 31 March 1990, for which a rateable value is not available. Of these, Yorkshire Water meters new properties, but provides an alternative method of charging based on the company's assessment of "notional rateable value" and Sutton Water provides the alternative of a flat rate fee. Four companies do not meter properties built since 31 March 1990. Dwr Cymru, Hartlepool Water and Portsmouth Water charge a flat rate fee for the annual service; and York Waterworks levy a charge based on the floor area of the property.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the water companies which offer *(a)* free and *(b)* subsidised meter installation. [38464]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Where water companies have a programme of meter installation, the meters are installed free of charge. In addition, the following companies offer free installation where a customer requests a meter under their meter option schemes:

Anglian Water

Severn Trent Water

Wessex Water

Folkestone and Dover Water

Mid-Southern Water

South East Water

Sutton and East Surrey Water

Wrexham and East Denbighshire Water

The remaining water companies charge for installation under their meter option schemes. The level of the charge is a matter for each company.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list water companies where all customers who live in properties built since 1989 have an option of paying metered bills or charges based on their property value. [38463]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Yorkshire water fits meters to all new properties first occupied from 31 March 1990, but gives the first occupant the opportunity to choose payment by an unmeasured, notional rateable value charge, provided that the first occupant exercises that right within 12 months of the date of occupation.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his oral statement on 9 July, *Official Report*, column 200, what proposals he has to ensure that those companies which continue to install compulsory meters in properties built since 1989 take steps to give their customers an option not to have a meter installed. [38487]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* It is for each water company to decide the most appropriate method of charging for water in its area. I have no powers to require a water company to provide a particular charging option.

Redundant Coalfield Sites

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy that English Partnerships may break up the portfolio of redundant coalfield sites it is seeking to transfer from British Coal in cases where prospective developers of new industry and jobs are otherwise seriously delayed. [38664]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The transfer of the portfolio depends upon the creation of

a balanced package of assets and liabilities. Singling out individual sites could disturb such a balance.

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what factors have led to the delays in transferring 80 sites from British Coal to English Partnerships; how many of these are in enterprise zones in Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire; what is the approximate total value of the sites; and when he expects these transfers to be completed. [38665]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Acquisition of a complete package totalling 2,700 hectares must be based on an independent assessment of the values and all associated liabilities. English Partnerships has, rightly, been concerned to satisfy itself that the assumptions made by British Coal were sound. Two of the individual sites are located in the Nottingham and Yorkshire enterprise zones. The value of individual sites depends on the terms of an overall transfer.

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his letter of July if he will make it his policy to ensure that English Partnerships agency has enough resources to transfer and process the priority sites at Manton Wood, Worksop, Nottinghamshire from British Coal to prospective factory developers. [38663]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The use of English Partnerships' resources is a matter for the agency. It would not agree to take on the British Coal portfolio unless it was confident that it had the resources to tackle the priority sites.

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will extend the 10-year benefits of enterprise zone status in coal mining areas to 11 years in cases where there have been serious delays by British Coal in transferring sites to English Partnerships. [38662]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* All enterprise zones have been designated for a period of 10 years.

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he gives to prospective factory developers who wish to move to enterprise zones and consequently sell their existing premises but find that enterprise zones cannot operate because British Coal and English Partnerships have not agreed on the transfer of the land. [38661]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* I would advise prospective developers to ensure that suitable premises to relocate are identified before existing premises are sold.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 24 July 1996

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Royal Visits

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what official visits were made abroad by members of the royal family in 1995–96; on what dates; at what cost; and which visits were made by use of the royal squadron. [38520]

Mr. Rifkind: Official overseas visits made by members of the royal family in 1995–96 at the request of my Department together with expenditure authorised by my Department, based on bills presented to date, are as follows. Visits on which aircraft of the royal squadron were used are identified by an asterisk.

	£
Princess Alexandra and Sir Angus Ogilvy to Botswana, Swaziland, and Senegal 14–24 October 1995*	14,800
The Duchess of Kent to The Netherlands 1 June 1995*	1,000
The Duchess of Kent to Belgium 16 June 1995*	1,100
The Duke of Edinburgh to France 8 May 1995*	1,200
The Duke of Gloucester to France 28 May 1995*	600
The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester to Mexico 20–23 May 1995	25,100
The Duke and Duchess of Kent to Norway 7–8 May 1995*	2,200
The Duke and Duchess of Kent to Germany 19–21 June 1995*	7,800
The Duke of Kent to Singapore 10–12 September 1995	11,500
The Duke of Kent to Portugal 8–9 March 1996*	700
The Duke of York to Gibraltar 13–14 July 1995*	700
The Prince Edward to Zimbabwe 30 August–2 September 1995	13,100
The Prince Edward to Luxembourg 15–16 September 1995*	400
The Prince of Wales to Germany 2–3 May 1995	1,900
The Prince of Wales to France 31 August 1995*	400
The Prince of Wales to Oman 1–3 October 1995	9,100
The Prince of Wales to Germany and Latvia 13–17 November 1995*	18,300
The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh to New Zealand for CHOGM, 30 October to 11 November 1995	79,000
The Prince of Wales to France 11 January 1996*	—
The Prince of Wales to Bosnia 8–9 February 1996*	800
The Prince of Wales to Morocco 23–27 February 1996*	5,500
The Prince of Wales to Dublin, 31 May–1 June 1995*	3,900
The Princess Margaret to the USA 23–29 June 1995	22,300
The Prince of Wales to Tel Aviv, 6 November 1995*	400
The Princess Royal to Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain, 12 to 17 November 1995*	11,500
The Princess Royal to the Republic of Ireland, 19 to 20 January 1996*	700
The Princess Royal to The Falkland Islands 28 January to 8 February 1996	900
State Visit to Poland and the Czech Republic 25–29 March 1996*	126,900

Sudan

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the different factional groups in southern Sudan; if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's communications with each group. [38917]

Mr. Hanley: There are a number of different groups of varying importance. The Sudan People's Liberation Army is the largest. Officials have frequent contacts with representatives of the main groups in London and Nairobi, as well as with those southern leaders resident in Sudan.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the past 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39148]

Mr. Hanley: Small and medium-sized businesses are the main target of the chargeable services provided by the FCO's 218 commercial overseas posts. Users of these services are surveyed for their assessment of the help provided. We publish the results in the FCO's annual departmental report. In April 1996 the National Audit Office concluded that in four south-east Asian markets the assistance available to small firms provided by the FCO and DTI helped to stimulate extra exports worth almost 80 times the cost of providing the services. We also help open markets to small and large businesses alike by advocating the progressive liberalisation of world trade through forums such as the World Trade Organisation and by developing closer relations with major trading partners.

Torture

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what account he takes in diplomatic and trading relations with foreign countries of their record in relation to torture of individual citizens and if such countries are complying with the United Nations convention against torture. [38992]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We take full account of a country's human rights record in our bilateral relations, including the practice of torture, which we deplore. We urge all states to ratify the convention against torture and abide by its provisions.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, (1) how many staff are assumed in his Department's budget, employed (i) full time and (ii) part-time, *(a)* to work on the press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39366]

(2) what was the cost of staff employed full time or part time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work on the press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94; [39432]

(3) what is his Department's budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media; [39350]

(4) how many staff were employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94; [39418]

(5) what is the cost budgeted for staff, employed full time or part time, to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39443]

(6) what is the cost, assumed in the budget, of people employed full-time or part-time to work on the press and the media in 1996–97. [39983]

Mr. Hanley: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Middle East Visit (Aircraft Charter)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what basis he decided to charter an aircraft registered in the United States for his recent visit to the middle east; and what account he took of the approach of the United States authorities to applications for similar operations by United Kingdom airlines. [39458]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Our brokers informed us that the aircraft was the only suitable one available at the time. Had a British charter company been able to supply an alternative UK aircraft, we would have used it.

We continue to urge the US Government to approve discretionary fifth freedom charters by UK companies. The decision on individual charter applications is a matter for the Secretary of State for Transport.

Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy towards the forthcoming review conference of the biological and toxin weapons convention; and if he will make a statement. [38307]

Mr. David Davis: Our main aim at the biological and toxin weapons convention fourth review conference in November and December this year is the endorsement of work of the ad hoc group set up to consider measures to strengthen the convention. This should include endorsement of the key elements of a future compliance regime. The Government will also play a full part in the wider review of the biological weapons convention, which we believe makes an important contribution to restraining proliferation and enhancing international security. The United Kingdom will chair the conference.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy towards ensuring that the obligations under article X of the biological and toxin weapons convention are upheld; and what proposals his Department will present to the forthcoming review conference in relation to article X. [38308]

Mr. Davis: We expect states parties to the biological and toxin weapons convention to meet fully their obligations under all articles of the convention. Discussion of the implementation of article X is currently taking place in the ad hoc group on strengthening the convention established in 1994. The ad hoc group will present a report to the fourth review conference.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals his Department will present to the forthcoming biological and toxin weapons convention review conference with regard to controlling dual-use technologies. [38309]

Mr. Davis: We do not intend to present any proposals to the conference in this area. The United Kingdom believes that national export licensing measures, harmonised multilaterally through our membership of the Australia Group, are a key tool in controlling the proliferating of biological weapons, and are necessary to implement article III of the convention in which states parties undertake not to transfer biological weapons to any recipient.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy towards strengthening the verification regime of the biological and toxin weapons convention; what activities his Department is already undertaking to that end; and what assistance the United Kingdom is receiving from other states in developing on-site inspection procedures. [38310]

Mr. Davis: We are working, through the ad hoc group set up in 1994 to examine measures to strengthen the biological weapons convention, for the establishment of a verification system for the convention in the form of a legally binding protocol. The Government believe that the protocol should at least include provisions on mandatory declarations, challenge inspection and the investigations of alleged use of biological weapons. The United Kingdom chairs the compliance measures sessions of the group, which deal specifically with these issues. The ad hoc group is open to participation by all states parties to the convention.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy towards the future of the Australia Group, and the controls therein, in relation *(a)* to the chemical weapons convention and *(b)* to the biological and toxin weapons convention. [38311]

Mr. Davis: The Australia Group makes an effective contribution to our overall efforts to prevent the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons. It has stated that it will review, in the light of the implementation of the chemical weapons convention, the measures its members take to prevent the proliferation of chemical weapons. The UK believes that national export controls will remain an effective means of implementing article III of the biological and toxin weapons convention in which states parties undertake not to transfer biological weapons to any recipient.

Kurdish People

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Turkey concerning the civil rights of the Kurdish people. [38517]

Mr. David Davis: We have taken a number of opportunities in the last few weeks to express, at a senior

level in Ankara, the depth of our on-going concern at Turkey's human rights performance. We will continue to urge the Turkish Government to act on their intention to develop religious, democratic and personal freedoms.

Pitcairn Islands

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has made to the letter from Dr. de Brooke of the Department of Zoology, Cambridge university, a copy of which has been supplied to him, on measures to eradicate rats in the Pitcairn Islands; what priority he is giving to the island of Oeno; and if he will make a statement. [38976]

Mr. Hanley: For both human health and biodiversity reasons we would welcome the elimination of the rats on Pitcairn. We are studying proposals to do this. No decision has yet been taken on the measures needed or on the priority to be given to each of the islands in the group.

Overseas Visits (Royal Family)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list the countries visited by Princess Alexandra at Her Majesty's Government's request since 1986–87; [39535]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 4 June, *Official Report*, columns *364-65*, which of the listed overseas visits by members of the royal family were initiated *(a)* at Her Majesty's Government's request, *(b)* by overseas Governments and *(c)* by others, specifying whom; [39543]

(3) if he will list the countries visited by the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, both separately and together, at Her Majesty's Government's request since 1986–87; [39534]

(4) what are the checking mechanisms for processing requests for clothing submitted by members of the royal family undertaking visits overseas at Her Majesty's Government's request; [39542]

(5) pursuant to his answer of 4 June, *Official Report*, column *364*, if he will give details of the engagements undertaken by the Prince of Wales on his visits to Los Angeles and Hong Kong on 31 October to 10 November 1994; if he will give a breakdown of the £53,300 costs; and how much was spent on clothing associated with the visit; [39540]

(6) pursuant to his answer of 4 June, *Official Report*, column *364*, if he will give details of the engagements undertaken by the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester on their visit to Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan of 4 to 6 October 1994; and how much was spent on clothes in connection with the visit; [39536]

(7) pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *26*, if he will give details of the engagements undertaken by the Duke and Duchess of Kent on their visit to Hong Kong on 25 November to 2 December 1994; [39532]

(8) pursuant to his answer of 4 June, *Official Report*, column *365*, if he will give details of the engagements undertaken by the Duke of Kent on his visit to Singapore on 10 to 12 September 1995; and what was the cost to his Department for clothes; [39538]

(9) pursuant to his answer of 18 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *607–610*, what was the composition of the party accompanying Princess Margaret to San Francisco on 23 to 29 June 1995; [39362]

(10) pursuant to his answer of 4 June, *Official Report*, column *363*, if he will list the engagements undertaken by the Princess Alexandra on her visit to the United States of America on 31 October to 3 November 1993; if he will give a breakdown of the costs; and how much was spent on clothes associated with the visit; [39541]

(11) pursuant to his answer of 4 June, *Official Report*, column *364*, if he will give a breakdown of the costs arising from the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester to Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan on 4 to 6 October 1994; and how much was spent on clothing; [39537]

(12) pursuant to his answer of 4 June, *Official Report*, column *364*, if he will give details of the engagements undertaken by the Princess Alexandra on her visit to Hong Kong on 14 October 1994; [39339]

(13) if he will list the countries visited by the Duke and Duchess of Kent, both separately, and together, at Her Majesty's Government request since 1986–87. [39363]

Mr. Rifkind: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Kosovo

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received and what action he has taken regarding human rights abuses in Kosovo. [39323]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have consistently expressed our concern about the treatment of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo in contacts at all levels with the Government of the Federal of Yugoslavia, FRY. The European Union declaration of 9 April 1996, on recognition by EU member states of the FRY, stated that the development of good relations between the EU and FRY, and the FRY's reintegration with the international community, would depend, inter alia, on full respect for human and minority rights and the granting of a large degree of autonomy for Kosovo within the FRY.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy in respect of opening a European Union office in Kosovo; and if he will make a statement. [39327]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We support a European Union presence in Kosovo. The form of any such presence would need to be agreed with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia authorities.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken to ensure the return of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe monitors to Kosovo. [39325]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We and our EU partners have stated publicly that an OSCE mission should be allowed to return to Kosovo. The Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are well aware that their participation in the OSCE is dependent on their co-operation in this matter.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action has been taken by the European Council to act upon the declaration—conclusions of the presidency—of the European Council summit in Edinburgh on 10 to 12 December 1992 with regard to Kosovo. [39329]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We and other European Union member states have repeatedly expressed concern to Federal Republic of Yugoslavia authorities about the human rights position in Kosovo and urged them and the leaders of Albanian community in Kosovo to begin discussions about the restoration of the autonomy of Kosovo within the FRY. The EU declaration of 9 April 1996 made it clear that the development of good relations between the FRY and the EU, and the FRY's reintegration into the international community, were dependent on progress in these areas.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the consequences of Serbia's policy of resettling Serbian refugees in Kosovo. [39324]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We recognise that a resettlement of disproportionate numbers of Serbian refugees in Kosovo would add to tensions in the region. The office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees continues to monitor the situation closely.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with (i) Slobodan Milosevic and (ii) representatives of his regime on *(a)* human rights in Kosovo and *(b)* restoration of Kosovo's autonomy. [39328]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We are in frequent contact with President Milosevic and members of his Government. We consistently express concern about the human rights situation in Kosovo, and our support for the restoration of the autonomy of Kosovo within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had recently with (i) Ibrahim Rugova and (ii) Dr. Bujar Bukoshi on the situation in Kosovo; and if he will make a statement. [39322]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: (i) My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary had a meeting with Dr. Rugova on 1 March during his visit to London.

(ii) None.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to open an office in Pristina. [39326]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: This issue is under consideration. No decisions have been taken. Any official UK presence in Kosovo would need to be agreed with the Government the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Spain (Holidaymakers)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the security arrangements being made to protect British holidaymakers in Spain. [39623]

Dr. Liam Fox: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in his name, or that of other Ministers in his Department, for meetings with Conservative hon. Members immediately preceding questions to his Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39528]

Mr. Hanley: Nil.

Departmental Vehicles (Traffic Violations)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the number of traffic violations involving departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39308]

Mr. Hanley: The information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visits (i) he and (ii) his ministers made to *(a)* the Newbury constituency and *(b)* other constituencies in the last 12 months. [39866]

Mr. Hanley: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Visa Status (Information)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the guidelines provided by his Department to Her Majesty's permanent representatives abroad with respect to the access of potential immigrants to information on their denial of visa status. [40026]

Mr. Hanley: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

European Movement

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what grants his Department made to the European Movement in each year since 1985; and what plans he has to offer financial assistance in future years. [40081]

Mr. David Davis: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Government Communications Headquarters (Recruitment)

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recruitment at GCHQ covering the information that is required to be published under the provisions of the recruitment code of the civil service commissioners. [40087]

Mr. Rifkind: It is GCHQ's policy that all recruitment to the Department is carried out on the basis of fair and open competition and selection on merit, subject to the exception permitted by the civil service commissioners and in accordance with the guidance issued by them. This policy is given force by the regulations in the staff handbook and on a more detailed level by the manual of recruitment produced by the recruitment office. The primary responsibility for ensuring that these requirements are adhered to rests with the head of the recruitment branch. The recruitment process forms part of the regular programme of inspection by GCHQ's internal audit unit. The recruitment office was inspected by the civil service commissioners in 1993.

The table gives details of the number of staff applying and recruited and the overall percentages at each grade during the calendar year 1995. Some candidates recruited in 1995 will be joining the Department within the calendar year 1996.

	Total		*Women*		*Ethnic minorities*		*Disabled*	
Grade	*Applied*	*Recruited*	*Applied*	*Recruited*	*Applied*	*Recruited*	*Applied*	*Recruited*
GC8 CS	128	2	5	1	4	0	0	0
GC9 CS		5		0		0		0
GC8 LB	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
GC9 LB	20	1	16	1	1	0	1	0
GC9 IO	562	5	98	1	20	0	7	0
GC10 CS	403	25	55	1	25	0	1	0
GC10 AA	202	12	112	7	13	0	0	0
GC10 LB	61	2	34	2	0	0	0	0
GMT	903	4	355	4	24	0	3	0
GC11 SY	61	1	5	0	0	0	1	0
GC13 SY	108	0	3	0	1	0	2	0
GC14 AA	6	1	5	1	0	0	0	0
GC14 GS	41	5	5	0	0	0	1	0
GC12 CE	154	8	18	1	1	2	0	0
Totals	2,652	72	711	19	89	2	16	0
Percentage	—	3	27	3	3	2	1	0

Explanations:

GC14 GS is a former Industrial Grade;

GC12 CE are student Scientist and Engineers;

GC11 and 13 SY are Security Officer Grades;

GC10 AA broadly equates to EO in the Home Civil Service;

GC10 CS broadly equates to SO in the Home Civil Service;

GC10 LB, GC9 LB and GC8 LB are Librarian Grades;

GC9 IO are Investigating Officers;

GC9 CS broadly equates to HSO in the Home Civil Service;

GC8 CS broadly equates to SSO in the Home Civil Service;

GMT = Graduate Management Trainee—GCHQ's Fast Stream.

The only category of exceptions to the general recruitment policy permitted by the commissioners and used by GCHQ during the period, excluding appointments for less than 12 months, was the reappointment of former members of the Department. Reinstatement has been a long-standing feature of GCHQ's recruitment both because of the unique nature of many of the skills used in the Department and because it provides an opportunity for members of staff to return after informal career breaks. In 1995 there were two female reinstatements, at GC10 and GC11 level respectively. There were no applications for reinstatements by people from ethnic minorities or with a disability.

Consular Fees

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to increase consular fees. [40088]

Mr. Hanley: An Order in Council was made on 23 July which provides for an overall average increase of 20 per cent. in consular fees with effect from 14 August 1996. It is Government policy that the cost of consular and entry clearance services should be borne by the users as far as possible.

Foreign Land Ownership

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he made during the Maastricht negotiations concerning the opt-out which enables the Danish Government to restrict foreign land ownership; and if he will make a statement. [38040]

Mr. David Davis *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* Protocol No. 1 to the European Community treaty deals with an issue which is specific to Denmark. The UK Government had no objection to it.

Beef Ban

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what legislative powers the Commission of the European Union has placed a ban on the export of British beef to any nation; what are the penalties for breaching such a ban; and how the decision of the Commission will be enforced. [24069]

Mrs. Browning *[pursuant to her reply, 8 July 1996, c. 87–88]:* I have been asked to reply and very much regret that my hon. Friend has had to wait so long for that to be done.

Commission decision 96/239/EC of 27 March 1996, which prohibited both the dispatch to other member states and the export to third countries of British beef and beef products from the UK, and Commission decision 96/362/EC of 11 June, amending decision 96/239/EC and allowing the export of certain beef products from the UK under strictly controlled conditions were based on Council directive 90/425/EEC and 89/662/EEC. The treaty base of both these directives is article 43 EC. This treaty provision allows the Council to adopt proposals relating to implementation of the common agricultural policy.

The decision is legally binding on the United Kingdom, and in the event of a failure to comply with the ban, the Commission or other member states would be able to take action in the European Court to require the UK to comply.

As regards implementation of the Commission decision, so far as exports to other member states are concerned, it is an offence under the Products of Animal Origin (Import and Export) Regulations 1992 (SI 1992 No. 3298) to export or consign for export any product of animal origin unless it complies with Community rules as set out in schedule 3 to the regulations or, in their absence, the national rules of the importing member state. Directive 64/433/EEC governing trade in red meat provides for only two possibilities: consignments must be accompanied by commercial documents or an export health certificate. The issue of all such certificates has been suspended. It is an offence under the regulations to export a product without the documentation required. Penalties for the breach of the regulations are set out in regulation 28. The maximum penalty on conviction for export without the necessary certificate would be two years' imprisonment and a fine.

Enforcement of the regulations is shared between the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the local authority concerned. In practice, local authorities generally take prosecutions under the regulations, but the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and in some circumstances the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Health, have powers to act where a local authority has failed to enforce.

Exports to third countries are governed by the import conditions established by the authorities of the third countries concerned and enshrined in export health certificates. To give force to this aspect of the Commission decision the issue of all such certificates for meat and meat products has been suspended. Any attempt to import one of the prohibited products without the necessary health certification would be a transgression of the rules of the importing country.

HM Custom and Excise is the enforcement authority for goods intended for export to third countries. Operational staff at all customs export stations have been informed of the terms of the EC ban and have been instructed to refuse to release for export to third countries any goods covered by the ban. Customs' legal powers in respect of properly declared goods of the descriptions covered by the Commission directive extend no further than refusing permission to export. In the case of wilful breach of customs controls, for example, by misdescription of banned beef and beef products, powers in the Customs and Excise Management Act, provide for the prosecution of offenders and in some circumstances the forfeiture of goods. The commissioners of Customs and Excise will consider prosecution of such offences in individual cases using the criteria they apply in all prosecutions

ENVIRONMENT

Non-domestic Rateable Value Prescriptions

Mr. Lord: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those industries for which he prescribes the non-domestic rateable value; and if he will make a statement. [39662]

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I currently prescribe the rateable values of the National Grid, National Power, PowerGen and other electricity generators, British Gas, British Rail, Railtrack, London Underground and all electricity distribution companies, water supply companies and certain statutory docks and harbours. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, under separate powers, prescribes the rateable values of utility undertakings in Scotland, including British Gas, water authorities, electricity companies, railways and certain docks and harbours.

It is our intention that from the date of the next revaluation—1 April 2000—these industries should be conventionally assessed by the Valuation Office in England and Wales and the Scottish Assessors in Scotland.

To this end, the Valuation Office is currently working with the industries to determine the feasibility of conventional assessment; and the Scottish Assessors Association has set up the public utilities co-ordination committee to work with the industries in Scotland.

We are also setting up an advisory committee to examine how the plant and machinery of the industries should be treated under conventional assessment, and we are today inviting applications from people interested in chairing or serving on that committee. Its terms of reference will be:

To consider:

(i) the extent to which the plant and machinery of industries currently subject to prescribed assessments would be rateable under existing legislation; and,

(ii) having regard to the financial and other considerations involved, to recommend any legislative changes required to ensure fairness of treatment and consistency with the principles that underlie present legislation governing the rating of plant and machinery in the UK.

Further details can be obtained from my Department.

I expect the committee to report by the end of September 1997.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 11 June, *Official Report*, column *116*, how many of the 372,000 households registered for home energy efficiency grants at 1 April

have not had the work carried out, what estimate he has made of the time scale required to clear the backlog of applications; and if he will make a statement. [37918]

Mr. Clappison: At the end of June, 334,691 pre-registrations remained on the list. Not all of these will result in claims for grant; but if they were to do so, and the current pattern and rate were maintained, all the pre-registrations would be cleared in less than 10 months. Over 140,000 HEES grants were paid in the first quarter of this year, of which some 37,000 were to people who had pre-registered their interest.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households to date have taken up the 25 per cent. grant payable under the home energy efficiency scheme. [37919]

Mr. Clappison: By 30 June 1996, 129 such grants had been paid.

Reference Rents (Bolton)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will investigate the current level of local reference rents applying to flats at *(a)* 76 Gilnow road and *(b)* 10 Columbia road, Bolton; and if he will make a statement on (i) delays relating to and (ii) levels of rent determinations in Bolton relative to (1) the north-west and (2) England. [38689]

Mr. Clappison: Rent officers are independent statutory officers. They are not accountable to the Secretary of State for their decisions on rent levels.

The Department is aware of concerns about delays to rent determinations in the Greater Manchester rent registration area. This problem has now been addressed by the appointment of four additional rent officers to the area.

Data on rents determined by rent officers since 2 January, including local reference rents, will be published in the Department's quarterly bulletin, *Rent Officer Statistics*. I will arrange for a copy of the bulletin covering the first quarter of 1996 to be sent to the hon. Member when published.

Business Rates

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to allow those businesses whose rates are being kept up by the transitional arrangements to be reduced to the full amount applicable to their valuation at the next Budget. [37670]

Sir Paul Beresford: I shall, before the start of the next financial year, review the limits on reductions in the rates bills of properties in downward transition. A commitment was given to this House to carry out such reviews before the start of each financial year, *Official Report*, 14 December 1994, column 950.

If no change is made to the limits then, for 1997–98, the bills for properties still in downward transition and with a rateable value of less than £10,000 or less than £15,000 in Greater London, will fall by a further 20 per cent. in real terms. For larger properties this further reduction in bills will be 15 per cent. in real terms.

Health and Safety Executive

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many HSE prosecutions there were in agriculture during 1995–96; and what was the *(a)* average, *(b)* highest and *(c)* lowest fine. [39124]

Sir Paul Beresford: Proceedings instituted by HSE's field operations division inspectorates in the agricultural sector 1995–96 were:

Informations laid: 177

Convictions: 114

(a) Average fine per conviction: £1,095

(b) Highest fine £10,000 (on two occasions)

(c) Lowest fine £50 (on one occasion).

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* improvement notices and *(b)* prohibition notices were issued by the HSE in agriculture for each of the past 10 years. [39126]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is as follows:

	Notice type			
Year	*Improvement*	*Deferred prohibition*	*Immediate prohibition*	*Total*
1986–87	5,607.00	172.00	1,660.00	7,439.00
1987–88	4,094.00	153.00	1,087.00	5,334.00
1988–89	3,671.00	56.00	1,134.00	4,861.00
1989–90	3,848.00	58.00	1,004.00	4,910.00
1990–91	3,737.00	99.00	1,027.00	4,863.00
1991–92	3,493.00	122.00	950.00	4,565.00
1992–93	3,034.00	98.00	978.00	4,110.00
1993–94	2,574.00	35.00	998.00	3,607.00
1994–95	2,458.00	37.00	695.00	3,190.00
1995–96[1]	1,539.00	21.00	599.00	2,159.00

[1] Provisional.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average fine for all industry in 1995–96 resulting from HSE prosecutions. [39125]

Sir Paul Beresford: The provisional figure for the average fine per conviction arising from prosecutions by the HSE was £2,567 in 1995–96.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in respect of how many of the recorded deaths in agriculture in 1995 there were HSE prosecutions; and what was the *(a)* average, *(b)* highest and *(c)* lowest fine in those cases. [39123]

Sir Paul Beresford: In the year commencing 1 January 1995, of the 42 deaths in the agriculture sector, five resulted in prosecutions. The average fine was £2,367.

The highest fine was £5,000 and the lowest was £100.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average frequency of visits by HSE inspectors to a farm where there are *(a)* five or less, *(b)* six to 10, *(c)* 11 to 50 and *(d)* more than 50 employees. [39127]

Sir Paul Beresford: This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Standard Spending Assessment (Leicestershire)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the standard spending assessment for 1996–97 in terms of pounds per head for each district council in Leicestershire. [39070]

Sir Paul Beresford: The standard spending assessments for 1996–97 were as follows:

	£
Blaby	64.32
Charnwood	78.02
Harborough	72.88
Hinckley and Bosworth	69.46
Leicester	136.42
Melton	80.76
North West Leicestershire	83.17
Oadby and Wigston	69.97
Rutland	79.25

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in his name, or that of other Ministers in his Department, for meetings with Conservative Members immediately preceding questions to his Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39514]

Mr. Gummer: None.

Departmental Vehicles (Traffic Violations)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of traffic violations involving departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39309]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department does not currently own vehicles, following the transfer of the Security Facilities Executive to the Office of Public Service. Disproportionate cost would be incurred in researching the relevant records of the Crown Suppliers, which has been closed down, and of the Property Services Agency, which was privatised.

Climate Change Conference

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the recent conference of contracting parties to the global convention on climate change held in Geneva; and if he will place in the Library a copy of his address to the conference. [39763]

Mr. Clappison: In Geneva, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State urged others to follow the UK lead in meeting current commitments; strongly supported the view that the recent findings of the intergovernmental panel on climate change constituted a clear scientific basis for urgent further action at the widest possible level; and reiterated his call for developed countries to agree, at the third conference in Japan in 1997, to aim to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to 10 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010.

I have placed in the Library a copy of my right hon. Friend's address to the conference, together with a copy of the conference ministerial declaration, which addressed most of the same key issues.

Late Payments

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what proportion of each Government office's bills were paid late in 1994–95; and what proportion this was of the total; [39857]

(2) what percentage of each Government office's bills were paid late in 1994–95; and what proportion this was of the total. [39856]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information was not collected in this form in 1994–95 and could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many visits (i) he and (ii) his Ministers made to *(a)* the Newbury constituency and *(b)* other constituencies in the last 12 months. [39876]

Mr. Gummer: In the last 12 months I have made one visit to the Newbury constituency and the Minister for the Environment and Countryside has made two.

I will write to the hon. Member giving the information requested on visits to other constituencies in the last 12 months.

Metropolitan Authorities (Boundary Review)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the ward boundaries last were reviewed; and when they are due to be reviewed again in each of the metropolitan authorities. [39654]

Sir Paul Beresford: The last reviews of the ward boundaries of the metropolitan districts took place in the following years:

	Last review
Bolton	1978
Bury	1978
Manchester	1980
Oldham	1977
Rochdale	1979
Salford	1979
Stockport	1979
Tameside	1977
Trafford	1978
Wigan	1979
Knowsley	1980
Liverpool	1979
St. Helens	1979
Sefton	1977
Wirral	1979
Barnsley	1977
Doncaster	1978
Rotherham	1978
Sheffield	1979
Gateshead	1979
Newcastle upon Tyne	1979
North Tyneside	1979
South Tyneside	1979
Sunderland	1979

	Last review
Birmingham	1979
Coventry	1979
Dudley	1979
Sandwell	1976
Solihull	1977
Walsall	1978
Wolverhampton	1979
Bradford	1979
Calderdale	1978
Kirklees	1979
Leeds	1979
Wakefield	1979

The Local Government Act 1992 provides that the Local Government Commission should, as far as reasonably practicable, conduct its own first periodic electoral review not less than 10 or more than 15 years after the Local Government Boundary Commission's review of the county in which the area is comprised. This does not apply where the Boundary Commission did not carry out a review of the county.

The Boundary Commission reviewed the electoral arrangements of West Midlands county council in 1981 and of Greater Manchester, Merseyside and West Yorkshire county councils in 1984. It did not review the electoral arrangements of South Yorkshire or Tyne and Wear county councils.

Housing Allocations

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will be taking into account the research his Department has commissioned from the university of Wales on housing allocations in the drafting of the new code of guidance on allocation which will accompany part UI of the Housing Bill, allocation of housing accommodation. [39622]

Mr. Clappison: Yes.

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to commence the provisions on housing allocations and homelessness contained in the Housing Bill; and if he will make a statement. [39913]

Mr. Curry: We intend that the new legislation should have full effect from early January 1997. During the summer and autumn of this year my officials will be preparing the draft secondary legislation and preliminary guidance associated with these provisions, in liaison with the local authority associations, other housing providers, the housing profession and the voluntary sector. We intend to have all the essential provisions in place well before full commencement, so that local authorities will have the proper opportunity to establish the arrangements necessary to ensure the smooth implementation of this important new legislation.

Cricket Stadium, Wakefield

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for what reasons his regional office in Leeds has issued an article 14 directive in respect of the outline planning application for a new stadium for Yorkshire county cricket in Wakefield; and if he will make a statement. [39653]

Sir Paul Beresford: An article 14 direction was issued to Wakefield metropolitan council on 23 July, preventing the council from granting planning permission for the proposed development at Denby Dale road, Wakefield, The Secretary of State is concerned that planning issues of more than local importance may arise from the proposal and he wishes to consider it having regard to his policy on calling in planning applications.

EU Ministers Meeting (Dublin)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what matters were discussed at the EU Environment Ministers informal meeting in Dublin on 19 and 20 July; and if he will place in the Library copies of the papers tabled at the meeting. [39738]

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment attended the recent meeting of Environment Ministers in Dublin. Their informal discussion concentrated on an exchange of views about waste management issues in the EU. With their agreement, I have placed in the Library a copy of the paper produced by the Irish presidency to inform that discussion.

Rural Sub-post Offices

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent guidelines his Department has published in respect of the uniform business rate relating to rural sub-post offices. [39798]

Sir Paul Beresford: On Wednesday 8 May we published a consultation paper setting out proposals for a new rate relief scheme for village shops. The proposals would help certain small general stores and post offices in rural villages. Qualifying business would see a reduction of at least 50 per cent. in their rates bills. Local authorities would be able to top this up to 100 per cent. and, in addition, would be able to grant relief to other rural shops and businesses which are of benefit to the community.

The consultation period has now ended. We shall consider carefully all comments received before reaching final decisions on the details of the scheme. We will then seek a suitable legislative opportunity to provide for the scheme.

Standard Spending Assessments (Devon)

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies he is undertaking into the effect of standard spending assessments on the county of Devon; and if he will make a statement. [39880]

Mr. Curry: We have commissioned a number of studies on local government finance and will have their findings as we prepare for next year's local government settlement. These cover the following areas: the area cost adjustment; the effects on local authority costs of sparsity and density of population; and the costs of personal social services for children and for the elderly in residential care.

The findings are the subject of detailed discussions with interested parties, but the eventual decisions will necessarily apply to all local authorities.

Advisory Group on Litter

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will respond to the recommendations of the advisory group on litter; and if he will make a statement. [39912]

Mr. Clappison: The advisory group made key recommendations on five areas of litter legislation in England and Wales: litter plans: litter problems on private land; litter problems on public land caused by commercial activity; dog fouling; and the fixed penalty notice system.

We have carefully considered the recommendation that each district council should be statutorily required to publish information about how it plans to fulfil its litter duty. Local authorities are already required by the Audit Commission to publish information about their performance in street cleansing. It is doubtful what additional benefit would be gained from a statutory litter plan. However, when we republish the code of practice on litter and refuse, we intend to include examples of good practice about providing information to the public on local authority powers and duties in relation to litter.

Primary legislation would be needed to fulfil the advisory group's recommendations about litter problems on private land and litter problems on public land caused by commercial activities. We are not convinced that this is appropriate. However, we shall look at the possibility of amending the Litter Control Areas Order 1991 and the Street Litter Notices Order 1991 to meet the main concerns of the advisory group.

The Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996 carries forward the recommendations for national legislation to replace dog fouling byelaws and for the introduction of a fixed penalty scheme. We are currently consulting on the detailed arrangements with a view to full implementation of these new simpler arrangements by the end of the year.

We agree that the fixed penalty for both littering and the new dog fouling offence should be set at £25. I propose that this should take effect in the autumn.

We shall consult local authorities and other interested bodies later this year on the draft revision to the code of practice on litter and refuse and on any proposals to change the orders relating to litter control areas or street litter control notices.

Automotive Air Conditioning Industry

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has reached agreement with the automotive air conditioning industry on their use of hydrofluorocarbons. [39948]

Mr. Gummer: The Government have today concluded a voluntary agreement with the automotive air conditioning industry on the use of hydrofluorocarbons. This agreement, which takes the form of a declaration of intent by the industry, is the fifth to be concluded on the use of HFCs, and will help us to meet our commitment to reduce HFC emissions in accordance with the UK climate change programme. It also reflects the Government's desire to achieve environmental objectives through voluntary action by industry, rather than regulation, wherever possible.

The declaration recognises that, in certain applications, HFCs are important alternatives to ozone-depleting substances. However, HFCs are greenhouse gases, and the declaration, with its industry guidelines, sets out strategies whereby emissions to atmosphere can be minimised. It thus provides a framework for the responsible use of HFCs by the industry as replacements for ozone-depleting substances.

The declaration is welcomed by the Government as a sign that the UK automotive air conditioning industry is contributing to the UK climate change programme.

Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if evidence will be invited from outside organisations before the Government respond to the royal commission on environmental pollution's 19th report. [39949]

Mr. Gummer: I have invited the Peat Producers Association to submit its evidence to the Department so that it can be taken into account when the Government respond to the commission's report on the sustainable use of soil. The Government plan to respond by the end of the year.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost, assumed in the budget, of people employed full time or part time to work on the press and the media in 1996–97. [39984]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her yesterday.

War Memorials

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is her policy with respect to the removal of or change of site of war memorials *(a)* throughout the country and *(b)* in the district local authority area of Stafford district council. [40006]

Sir Paul Beresford: There is no national planning policy guidance expressly relating to the location of war memorials in general. This is normally a matter for the local planning authority to consider.

Local Government Superannuation Scheme

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what plans the Government have to review the local government superannuation scheme, with particular reference to the payment of a full spouse's pension to the person to whom the contributor was married at the date of death; [40027]

(2) what is the estimated cost of extending the provisions of the 1978 amendments to the local government superannuation scheme to those who are currently receiving LGSS pensions and who retired prior to 1978. [40028]

Sir Paul Beresford: As I announced to the House on 22 July, *Official Report*, column *27*, we have decided to adopt the proposals for the future of the local government pension scheme on which we consulted earlier this year. Within the framework of these proposals, we are continuing to assess, including the cost implications, a number of possible scheme improvements, including the payment of pensions for post-retirement marriages. It is our intention to announce the outcome of these assessments as part of the proposed consultation on the new draft regulations to which I referred in my 22 July announcement.

European Movement

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what financial assistance his Department made to the European Movement in each year since 1985 *(a)* directly and *(b)* through local government; and what plans he has to offer financial assistance in future years. [40076]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department has made no direct financial assistance to the European Movement and has no plans to do so in future. Information relating to any financial assistance made through local government is not held centrally.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the total number of magistrates courts in each region, for each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [39116]

Mr. Streeter: The information requested is not readily available; I will reply as soon as possible.

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in his name for meetings with Conservative Members immediately preceding questions to his Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39531]

Mr. Streeter: None.

Departmental Vehicles (Traffic Violations)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the number of traffic violations involving departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39305]

Mr. Streeter: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals he has for capital schemes for the improvement of courts to be paid for by private sources; and if he will make a statement. [39074]

Mr. Streeter: There are proposals to provide new or improved facilities at 50 magistrates courts under the private finance initiative. In the Court Service, there are two major refurbishment schemes at early stages of planning which are possible candidates for PFI funding. They are the provision of a civil hearing centre in Bristol and the improvement of facilities at the Crown court at Knutsford.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidelines have been published concerning magistrates court committees and the private finance initiative; how many schemes have been started; and if he will make a statement. [39073]

Mr. Streeter: Guidelines are being issued this week to all magistrates court committees providing guidance on the private finance initiative. No schemes have yet been started.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the cost of staff employed full time or part time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work on the press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94. [39408]

Mr. Streeter: The cost of staff employed full time and part time providing information and publicity and working on the press and media in 1995–96 was £207,994; in 1994–95 was £232,204; and in 1993–94 was £203,390.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff are assumed, in his Department's budget, employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, *(a)* to work on press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39467]

Mr. Streeter: Ten full-time staff and one part-time member of staff are assumed in my Department's budget employed to work on press and media, and to provide information and publicity in 1996–97.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff were employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94. [39422]

Mr. Streeter: Eight full-time and one part-time member of staff were employed to provide information and publicity and on press and media in 1995–96; the same number were employed in 1994–95 and in 1993–94.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the cost budgeted for staff employed full time or part time to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39448]

Mr. Streeter: The cost budgeted for staff, employed full and part time, to provide information and publicity in 1996–97 is £292,779.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his Department's budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media. [39346]

Mr. Streeter: My Department has no budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the cost, assumed in the budget, of people employed full time or part time to work on the press and the media in 1996–97. [39976]

Mr. Streeter: The cost assumed in the budget of people employed full time or part time, to work on press and media in 1996–97 is £279,779.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the past 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39151]

Mr. Streeter: The Government recognise the crucial role played by small firms in the UK economy and aim to help them by providing sound economic conditions—keeping inflation and interest rates low; reducing legislative, administrative and taxation burdens; and, where appropriate, providing direct assistance in the form of specialist advice and support and easing access to finance.

The Lord Chancellor's Department has a continuing programme to reduce the cost delay and complexity of civil litigation. This is of direct benefit to small firms. Measures undertaken in the past 12 months include an increase in the limit for automatic referral to the small claims procedure from £1,000 to £3,000; the publication of a plain English booklet to increase awareness of methods of resolving disputes without going to court; and a review to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the bailiff service, which should assist small firms in the enforcement of commercial debt. At present, statistical collection of data on court proceedings does not differentiate small firms from other classes of litigant.

The Department is a signatory to the CBI's prompt payment code. As previously measured, its payment record improved from 93.5 per cent. to 93.7 per cent. of invoices paid on time. It is now pursuing the new targets devised by the Prime Minister and the Economic Secretary to the Treasury in consultation with Departments following the "Your Business Matters" conferences.

Solicitors (Costs)

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 15 July, *Official Report*, column *402*, what is the name, and firm, of the practising solicitor nominated by the president of the Law Society to assist the judge reviewing taxation of costs. [38914]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked him to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Sir Julian Critchley, dated 24 July 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the name of the practising solicitor nominated to assist with reviews of taxation of costs.

Such reviews are governed by Order 62, rule 35 of the Rules of the Supreme Court which provides that, if he decides assistance from assessors is required, the judge shall appoint not less than two assessors, one of whom shall be a taxing officer and one a practising solicitor. When a solicitor assessor is required, the court asks the Law Society for a nomination. The Court Service does not maintain an independent list of solicitor assessors.

Debt Judgments (York)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of households in York had one or more judgments in respect of debt made against them at York country court in each of the last five years. [39566]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked him to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Michael Meacher, dated 24 July 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has asked me to reply to your Question about debt judgments at York County Court.

These figures are not held centrally and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many county court judgements in respect of debt were made against *(a)* persons resident in York and *(b)* all persons at York county court in each of the last five years. [39568]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked him to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Michael Meacher, dated 24 July 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has asked me to reply to your Question about judgments against people resident in York and at York County Court.

It is not possible to give a figure for debt judgments but the total number of judgements made at York County Court in the last five years is:

1991: 22,161

1992: 19,500

1993: 19,697

1994: 10,768

1995: 5,638

Figures about where the people concerned live are not held centrally and could also only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Solicitors (Overcharging)

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints of overcharging on the part of solicitors were received from the public and directed to the taxation

master in the years 1995, 1994, 1993 and 1992; and what proportion of them resulted in a reduction of the original fees charged. [37857]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked him to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Sir Julian Critchley, dated 24 July 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of complaints referred to the Taxation Master concerning solicitors overcharging.

I am unable to provide the information because no details are kept of the reasons given for requesting taxation of solicitors' charges.

Commonhold Property Ownership

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Government intend to implement their proposals for commonhold property ownership. [40022]

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how the Government intend to implement their proposals for commonhold property ownership. [39911]

Mr. Streeter: The Government have today published a draft Bill and consultation paper to show in detail how they propose to implement their proposals. The draft Bill represents a thorough reworking of the principles on which commonhold is based and, subject to the results of the consultation, the Government intend to bring forward legislation in this form as soon as a suitable opportunity occurs.

Juvenile Crime (Custodial Sentences)

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many juvenile cases in which guilty pleas were entered were dealt with by the Crown courts in 1995–96; and how many resulted in custodial sentences. [39105]

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

Information regarding 1995 plea data will not be available until the autumn.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of the £4.3 million paid out as legal aid in 1995–96 in respect of juvenile cases in the youth courts in which the defendant pleaded guilty *(a)* was paid out in respect of cases that resulted in custodial sentences and *(b)* was paid out in respect of cases that resulted in non-custodial sentences or some other non-custodial form of discharge. [39106]

Mr. Streeter: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

TRANSPORT

Automated Train Protection

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what budget his Department has allocated to the introduction of automated train protection. [38523]

Mr. Watts: Since April 1994, Government support for the railway industry takes the form of grants paid by the franchising director. These grants enable the railway industries to meet their expenditure requirements, including those with safety benefits. Safety expenditure by the railway has not been separately identified since 1992–93, because the finance and resources to manage safety have been fully integrated with other management decisions.

Trackworks (Advance Warning)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if it is his policy to put in place regulations to ensure that train drivers are given adequate warning of workers on or near the track in a similar way to which prior warning is given to motorists approaching roadworks. [38535]

Mr. Watts: I have no plans to make new regulations for the giving of warnings to train drivers. Railway operators are already required by the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 to ensure the safety of their employees and others who might be affected by their undertakings, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Guidance on securing safety on the track and meeting the legal obligations has been published by the Health and Safety Commission's Railway Industry Advisory Committee.

Stafford and Ais Gill Rail Crashes

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to publish the report into the Stafford and Ais Gill rail crashes. [38531]

Mr. Watts: The report of the inquiry into Ais Gill is to be compiled by an inspecting officer of the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate, who has been appointed as an assessor to the coroner under the regulation of the Railways Act 1871 to assist with the inquest. The inspector's report will be completed and published as soon as the coroner has conducted the inquest. In the meantime, the recommendations made by the inspecting officer as a result of his investigations have been implemented by the railways.

The publication of the report into the Stafford (Rickerscote) rail crash is a matter for the Health and Safety Commission. A report will be issued when the HSE's complex technical investigation into the crash is complete.

Level Crossings (Fatalities)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fatalities have occurred at railway level crossings during each of the last five years *(a)* on the west coast main line and *(b)* on the national railway network; and what action he is taking to prevent further fatalities. [38231]

Mr. Watts: Information on fatalities that have occurred at level crossings on the west coast main line is only available at disproportionate cost. Fatalities on the national railway network from 1990 to 1994–95 are as listed.

	Pedestrian	Occupant of road vehicle	Total
1990	19	3	22
1991–92	11	7	18
1992–93	6	4	10
1993–94	9	5	14
1994–95	10	3	13

Chapter 12 of the chief inspecting officer of railways annual report on the safety record of the railway in Great Britain in 1994–95 lists the initiatives under way to reduce the accident rate at level crossings. A copy of the report is held in the House of Commons Library.

Track Safety

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the red/green zone working group report from Her Majesty's railways inspectorate on track safety—recommendation 6(h)—with particular reference to the conflict between the safe system of work for track workers and penalty repayments for the delays to trains. [38537]

Mr. Watts: I understand that the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate is following up its report with Railtrack plc. I am confident that HSE and Railtrack will ensure that safety is not compromised.

Rail Privatisation

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been spent on advertising in relation to railway privatisation. [38587]

Mr. Watts: The Government have spent some £2.9 million on advertising in relation to the flotation of Railtrack. The Office of Passenger Rail Franchising has spent some £23,000 on advertising in relation to franchising. Both these figures exclude VAT, which is not a net cost to the Exchequer. The British Railways Board is responsible for any expenditure on advertising the sales of its businesses.

Clapham Rail Disaster (Inquiry Recommendations)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the recommendations of the inquiry into the Clapham rail disaster which have not been implemented in full and the target dates for implementation. [38530]

Mr. Watts: I refer to my reply to a question by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 16 October, *Official Report*, columns *86–87*. Further to that reply, I understand that fitment of the national radio system of communication is now virtually complete.

Rolling Stock

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the financial value of the railway rolling stock units ordered for each year since 1979. [38548]

Mr. Watts: Figures on a year-by-year basis are not available. However, since 1979 over £4 billion has been invested in railway rolling stock.

Train Doors (Fatalities)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fatalities due to passengers falling from train doors have occurred during each of the last five years *(a)* on the west coast main line and *(b)* on the national railway network; and what action he is taking to prevent further fatalities. [38232]

Mr. Watts: Information on fatalities involving passengers falling from train doors on the west coast main line is available only at disproportionate cost.

Passenger fatalities on the national railway network involving falls from trains from 1991–92 to 1995–96 are as follows:

1991–92: 19

1992–93: 9

1993–94: 8

1994–95: 6

1995–96: 3 (figures for 1995–96 are provisional)

The statistics up to 1994–95 are taken from the 1994–95 chief inspecting officer of railways annual report on the safety record of the railways in Great Britain, a copy of which is held in the Library.

In 1993 the Health and Safety Executive published its report into passenger falls from train doors. This raised passenger and staff awareness and maintenance standards. As a result the accident rate has fallen. Although much progress has been made by the railways, HSE's railway inspectorate continues to monitor maintenance standards of doors and locks and technical modifications. All InterCity trains now have a centralised locking system fitted, operated by the guard, who normally will free the doors to be opened only when trains are stationary at the platform.

Rail Routes

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he has made for purchasers of land to be able to search for the proposed routes of railways to which his approval is required. [38913]

Mr. Watts: Promoters of new railways are required, by the statutory procedures under the Transport and Works Act 1992, to notify relevant local planning authorities of the intended application. This notice should provide sufficient evidence of intent to make an application for the authority to make the information available in response to searches. However, the authorities may decide to do so earlier or, possibly, as late as the date of the application, having regard to the particular circumstances of the case and all relevant information available to them.

Manchester Airport

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the factors preventing a regular through train service from Birmingham to Manchester airport. [39401]

Mr. Watts: None. The level of service on a particular routes is a matter for the train operating units and, where appropriate, the franchising director.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans the Government have to support a bid for European funding for a multi-modal transport interchange at Manchester airport. [39400]

Mr. Bowis: Departmental and airport company officials will be meeting to discuss the company's plans and how they might best be packaged.

Traffic Bottlenecks

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he expects to be made *(a)* this year and *(b)* over the next five years in eliminating the current bottlenecks on motorways and trunk roads, identified by the congestion maps published by his Department. [39495]

Mr. Watts: My Department's plans for eliminating bottlenecks over the current year were spelt out in November 1995 in "Managing the Trunk Road Programme" and in the Highways Agency's business plan, 1996–97. Progress over the next five years will include schemes to be taken from the design, build, finance and operate system and main programmes set out in tables 4 and 5 respectively of "Managing the Trunk Road Programme". We shall also continue to make improvements under the network enhancement programme and to introduce further measures for the better management of the network.

Rail Safety

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to ensure that the existing controls on the hours of work of train drivers and safety critical staff are maintained. [39387]

Mr. Watts: Under the Railways (Safety Critical Work) Regulations 1994, employers have a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that staff undertaking safety critical work do not work such number of hours as would be liable to cause fatigue which could endanger safety.

The Health and Safety Commission has recently consulted on a draft approved code of practice which would give practical guidance to employers on their duty, including guidance on carrying out a risk assessment before making changes to existing working time patterns. The HSC expects to submit the draft ACOP to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport in the next few weeks for his consent prior to formal approval and issue.

Traffic Statistics

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the annual growth in traffic on *(a)* all roads and *(b)* motorways and trunk roads for each of the last 10 years. [39496]

Mr. Watts: The annual growth in all motor vehicle traffic—measured in vehicle miles—on all roads and motorways and trunk roads for each of the last 10 years is given in the table.

Annual growth in all motor vehicle traffic

Year	*All roads per cent.*	*Motorways and Trunk Roads per cent.*
1985–86	5.0	7.5
1986–87	7.7	13.2
1987–88	7.2	7.1
1988–89	8.3	9.1
1989–90	1.0	2.5
1990–91	0.2	–0.2
1991–92	0.1	–0.2
1992–93	0	1.8
1993–94	2.5	2.9
1994–95	2.0	3.5

Source:
National Traffic Census.

Traffic Noise

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the number of households in Great Britain where the level of noise as a result of traffic is *(a)* between 55dB and 68dB, and *(b)* greater than 68dB. [39483]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question concerning estimates of the number of households in Great Britain where the level of noise as a result of traffic is (a) between 55dB and 68dB and (b) greater than 68dB.

In 1980 the Noise Advisory Council estimated that about 3 million households in England suffered a level of noise exceeding 68dB(A) as a result of road traffic. The Highways Agency has in hand a research project scheduled to finish in late 1997 which includes a review of the data on which this estimate was based.

No estimate has been made of the number of households where the noise levels lie between 55 and 68dB(A).

BAA Airports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the percentage of total United Kingdom air traffic currently handled at airports owned by BAA in terms of *(a)* passengers and *(b)* air transport movements. [39501]

Mr. Bowis: In 1995, 70 per cent. of all United Kingdom air passengers and 56 per cent. of air transport movements were handled by BAA airports.

Trunk Road Programme

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the current time scale for construction on each of the schemes listed under the main programme in the trunk road programme. [39485]

Mr. Watts: No. Decisions on which schemes will start in a particular financial year are taken in the light of the public expenditure settlement and are announced before the start of the year in question.

Track Access Grants

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the individual track access grant payments made in each of the last five years. [39361]

Mr. Watts: None as yet, but the first claim for payment in respect of Freightliner is imminent and offers of grant have been made in five other cases. The track access grant scheme was introduced in April 1994

Bypasses

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received over the last six months in support of the building of bypasses. [39481]

Mr. Watts: I have received many positive representations from residents of towns and villages wanting bypasses and from representatives of motoring organisations and the road haulage industry.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new bypasses were constructed between *(a)* 1979 and 1991 and *(b)* 1991 and 1996. [39294]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Glenda Jackson, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about how many new bypasses were constructed between (a) 1979 and 1991 and (b) 1991 and 1996.

The number of new bypasses opened between 1979 and 1991 was 120, and between 1991 and 1996, 53.

Foreign Airlines

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will require foreign airlines which base their aircraft in the United Kingdom to comply with the United Kingdom's normal operational and safety requirements. [39378]

Mr. Bowis: No. As a signatory to the Chicago convention the United Kingdom is obliged to accept certificates and licences issued in respect of foreign registered aircraft provided that the minimum safety standards laid down by the International Civil Aviation Organisation are being met. However, the new measures on fifth freedom charter flights, which my noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping announced on 19 June, should discourage foreign airlines from basing passenger aircraft in the UK.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take action to prevent the selling of capacity on foreign registered aircraft in advance of their operators receiving authorisation to operate from the United Kingdom or obtaining flight slots. [39507]

Mr. Bowis: No. If tour operators were prevented from selling air holidays or air seats before entering a contract with an airline, this could severely affect their ability to respond to consumer demand, leading to restricted choice for customers and higher holiday prices.

Noise Barriers

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans his Department has to extend the use of acoustically absorbent noise barriers alongside roads. [39484]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question concerning any plans for extending the use of acoustically absorbent noise barriers alongside roads.

Noise mitigation barriers are prescribed in principle by location, length and height; various other characteristics may be provided for in particular contracts to prescribe quality and type of materials, structural form and acoustic properties.

Decisions on the use of absorbent materials in noise barriers are made on a case by case basis on the grounds of technical merit and cost-effectiveness. They do provide a measure of relief from reverberation of traffic noise which reduces the effectiveness of conventional barriers in some circumstances.

There are no forward plans to specifically extend the use of absorbent materials, except to the extent that circumstances may justify it.

Air Traffic

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to update his Department's forecasts for air traffic for (i) passengers and (ii) air transport movements. [39389]

Mr. Bowis: The Department intends to publish updated air traffic forecasts early next year. In common with previous forecasts these will cover passengers at United Kingdom airports, but not air transport movements.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of air traffic at United Kingdom airports is interlining (i) to United Kingdom destinations, (ii) to European destinations and (iii) intercontinental destinations. [39546]

Mr. Bowis: No estimates of the proportion of total UK traffic that is accounted for by interlining have been published, but the Civil Aviation Authority has produced estimates for Heathrow and Gatwick on the CAA's survey of passengers at London airports in 1991—CAP610, tables 25 and 26. This showed that 26 per cent. of passengers at Heathrow were interlining in that year. Of these, 37 per cent. were travelling either to or from UK destinations, 54 per cent. were travelling either to or from other European destinations and the remaining 9 per cent. were interlining between non-European destinations. At Gatwick, 9 per cent. of passengers were interlining in 1991. Of these, 38 per cent. were travelling either to or from UK destinations, 50 per cent. were travelling either to or from other European destinations and the remaining 12 per cent. were interlining between non-European destinations. Figures for Manchester and other regional airports are given in the CAA survey of passengers at central England airports, CAP 618, Table 67.

Road Schemes

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by name those road schemes at the preferred route stage which will have an impact on *(a)* lowland heath, *(b)* Caledonian pine, *(c)* chalk grassland and *(d)* reedbeds, and if he will indicate in percentage terms the total area of the United Kingdom currently covered by these four habitats. [39498]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 21 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking if he will list by name those road schemes at the preferred route state which will have an impact on *(a)* lowland heath, *(b)* Caledonian pine, *(c)* chalk grassland and *(d)* reedbeds, if he will indicate in percentage terms the total area of the United Kingdom currently covered by these four habitats.

I have set out the schemes in the current programme which the Highways Agency expect to reach preferred route state during 1996/97.

Information on the impact, if any, these schemes will have on the four habitats listed is being collected and I will write to the hon. Member separately as soon as it is available. My Department does not have information on the total area of the UK covered by these habitats.

A1(M) Bramham—Wetherby

A1(M) Wetherby Bypass

A14 Rookery Crossroads Grade Separated Junction

A36 Beckington—East of Bath Improvement

A259 Guestling Thorn Bypass

M1 Junction 10 to 15 Widening

M5 Junction 17 to 21 Widening

M6 Junction 11A to 16 Widening

M6 Junction 16 to 19 Widening

M11 Junction 8 to 9 Widening

M40 Junctions 3 to 4 Widening and Junction 4 Improvement

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what projections he has made of the annual cost to public funds in the years beyond 1998–99 of the road schemes already let as design, build, finance and operate schemes and those schemes expected to start in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98. [39491]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about DBFOs.

Tranche 1 contracts have been signed. Annual payments will be around £100m in 1999–2000 and will range up to £144m per year during the contract period. Negotiations on tranche 1A contracts are not all concluded, although they are expected to be completed during 1996/97. Tranche 2 has been announced but tenders have yet to be invited. At this stage any estimates of payments must be highly speculative but we expect the annual payments for both tranches together to range between £130m and £300m from 1999–2000 to the end of the contract period.

Heathrow and Gatwick Airports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact of the channel tunnel on development of traffic at Heathrow and Gatwick airports. [39390]

Mr. Bowis: The Department of Transport's 1994 air traffic forecasts estimated the number of passengers the channel tunnel will divert away from the London airports taken together. No estimates were made of the likely impact on individual airports. The forecasts found that in 2010 between 7.6 and 12.8 million air passengers will divert to the channel tunnel from London airports.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessments he has made of the effect of the opening of a fast rail link between London and the channel tunnel on the number of (i) air passengers and (ii) air traffic movements at Heathrow and Gatwick airports. [39391]

Mr. Bowis: The Department of Transport's 1994 air traffic forecasts estimate diversion from air to the channel tunnel of 7.6 million passengers a year under the low scenario assuming no high-speed rail link from London is in place and 12.8 million under the high scenario which includes a high-speed rail link in addition to a number of other more favourable assumptions. The Department has made no individual forecasts of the impact of the high-speed rail link on air transport movements at Heathrow and Gatwick.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of the last 10 years the average passengers per air traffic movement at Heathrow and Gatwick airports for *(a)* scheduled operations and *(b)* charter operations. [39511]

Mr. Bowis: The table gives the figures requested:

Passengers per air traffic movement: 1986–1995

	Heathrow		*Gatwick*	
	Scheduled	*Non-scheduled*	*Scheduled*	*Non-scheduled*
1986	110	12	80	136
1987	116	11	87	146
1988	116	12	89	151
1989	116	12	91	148
1990	118	18	94	153
1991	113	25	96	154
1992	117	45	92	161
1993	122	41	92	164
1994	127	36	92	167
1995	130	33	92	172

British Rail Vendor Unit

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* statutory and *(b)* other procedures govern the activities of the British Rail vendor unit. [39261]

Mr. Watts: The board of British Railways, appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport, prepares businesses for sale and sell them subject to the direction and consent of the Secretary of State whose objectives for such sales are set out in section 113 of the Railways Act 1993. The vendor unit carries out the day-to-day implementation of the board's sale strategy on certain disposals. The vendor unit follows procedures approved by the board and where appropriate agreed by the Department.

Marine Safety Agency

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by *(a)* classification society, *(b)* country of registration and *(c)* port in which they were detained, the number of ships detained by the MSA in each of the last two years. [39358]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of ships detained by the Marine Safety Agency (MSA) in each of the last two years.

The numbers of foreign flagged vessels detained by the MSA, listed by classification society, country of registration and port in which they were detained, in the calendar years 1994 and 1995 are given in the attached tables.

A list containing information about the foreign flagged ships under detention in UK ports, including the ships' particulars and the reason for detention, is published monthly by the MSA.

A27

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he received the report of the inspector at the public inquiry into his Department's proposals for the development of the A27 in the Worthing area; and when he expects to announce a decision on the route. [39631]

Mr. Watts: The inspector's report was received on 2 February and is being considered by the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport. They will announce their decision as soon as possible.

Motorway Service Areas

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many motorway service areas have been closed since the financial year 1991–92. [39289]

Mr. Watts: None.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each agency within his Department and the central transport group, broken down by grade, the number of *(a)* male staff and *(b)* female staff. [38138]

Mr. Bowis: I have placed the information obtained from my Department's personnel systems in the Library of the House.

Traffic Area Office, Manchester

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals have been put to the traffic area network unit within his Department for reducing accommodation costs at the traffic area office in Manchester; and what action was taken to following up these proposals. [38139]

Mr. Bowis: The traffic area office in Manchester, in consultation with the local representatives of Property Holdings, put to the traffic area network unit three possible proposals in September 1994:

Stay in Portcullis house until the lease expired and await re-location to Ashburner house.

Give notice to Property Holdings and move to another property on the Government estate.

Look for alternative accommodation within the commercial market.

It was agreed between the traffic area office and the traffic area network unit that the third of these options was not viable due to vacant accommodation being available on the Government's own estate. No action was taken to follow up the other two proposals and the second option was overtaken by the timetable for the transfer of Property Holdings responsibilities to Departments.

Drivers' Hours

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to provide enforcement officers with powers to issue prohibition notices to United Kingdom drivers who have exceeded their drivers' hours regulations. [38147]

Mr. Bowis: None at present. We are keeping the situation under review but the change proposed would require primary legislation.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to carry out an annual survey into the unlicensed operation of heavy goods vehicles. [38144]

Mr. Bowis: We have no current plans to repeat the survey of illegal goods vehicle operators which was carried out in October last year.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of heavy goods vehicles divided by weight involved in road accidents which have resulted in *(a)* fatal, *(b)* serious and *(c)* slight injuries during 1995. [38202]

Mr. Bowis: The number of HGVs involved in injury road accidents, by gross weight and accident severity in Great Britain in 1995 was as follows:

Vehicles

Gross weight	*Accident severity*			
	Fatal	*Serious*	*Slight*	*Total*
3,501–16,000	126	735	3,164	4,017
16,001–24,000	107	495	1,899	2,501
24,001–33,000	134	599	2,256	2,990
33,001–38,000	247	883	3,119	4,258
Total	614	2,713	10,438	13,765

1. The weight distributions are estimated from road accidents data submitted by the police. Differences in totals are due to rounding.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what budgets were allocated to the enforcement of heavy goods and public service safety regulations for each of the last 10 years. [38146]

Mr. Bowis: Figures for years before 1991–92 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Figures for the last five years are as follows:

Year	*HGV traffic and roadworthiness enforcement budgets (£)*	*PSV traffic and roadworthiness enforcement budgets (£)*
1991–92	11,223,746	2,268,680
1992–93	11,303,161	2,347,610
1993–94	11,112,988	2,116,650
1994–95	10,921,773	2,186,787
1995–96	11,063,032	2,281,217

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to commit further funds into

front-line enforcement of heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles safety regulations by Vehicle Inspectorate enforcement officers. [38212]

Mr. Bowis: We have no such plans at present.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to use laden heavy goods vehicles in heavy goods vehicle driving tests. [38206]

Mr. Bowis: We are currently looking at the case for requiring learner lorry drivers to use ballasted vehicles when taking a lorry driving test. It could have significant implication for the cost of training and testing new lorry drivers, and there would need to be detailed consultation with the parties affected before the necessary regulations could be put before Parliament.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents *(a)* in total, *(b)* involving serious injuries and *(c)* involving fatalities involved heavy goods vehicles in each of the years 1979 to 1996. [39285]

Mr. Bowis: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Accidents involving HGVs: by accident severity: GB: 1979–1995

	Accident severity		
Year	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Total*
1979	940	4,690	16,471
1980	782	4,051	14,117
1981	761	3,859	13,283
1982	786	3,808	13,307
1983	722	3,387	12,328
1984	777	3,570	12,950
1985	728	3,457	13,073
1986	794	3,503	13,435
1987	776	3,509	13,642
1988	802	3,737	14,775
1989	878	3,795	16,107
1990	791	3,387	15,063
1991	683	2,885	13,616
1992	650	2,706	13,016
1993	608	2,520	13,173
1994	540	2,598	13,178
1995	530	2,445	12,613

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the amount of revenue lost due to the illegal operation of heavy goods and public service vehicles. [38143]

Mr. Bowis: No estimate of lost income has been made.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to apply the income raised from heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicle operator licences for the enforcement of heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicle regulations. [38142]

Mr. Bowis: Income raised from both heavy goods and public service vehicle operators is part of general taxation and as such is paid into the central Exchequer funds and not ring fenced. The Department is, however, required to set fees at such a level as to recover from operators the total sums spent both on enforcement and on running the traffic area offices.

Public Service Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of public service vehicles involved in road accidents resulting in *(a)* fatal, *(b)* serious and *(c)* slight injuries during 1995. [38203]

Mr. Bowis: In 1995, there were 134 public service vehicles involved in fatal accidents, 1,487 serious accidents and 9,359 in slight injury accidents.

British Rail

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was British Rail's external finance limit for 1992–93. [39295]

Mr. Watts: The British Railways Board's external finance limit for 1992–93 was set at £2,096 million. The outturn for the board's external finance requirement for that year was £2,064 million.

New Roads and Rail

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of *(a)* new trunk roads were constructed and *(b)* new railway track were electrified between (i) 1979 and 1992 and (ii) 1992 and 1996. [39293]

Mr. Watts: The length of new trunk roads completed in England between 1979 and 1992 was 842.4 miles and between 1992 and 1996, 268.5 miles. The length of newly electrified railway track between 1979 and 1992 was 725.3 miles and between 1992 and March 1995, 52.2 miles. There are no figures yet for 1995–96.

Staff Annual Reports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will publish a table showing separately for each grade in the central transport group the numbers of staff who received *(a)* a fitted, *(b)* a well fitted and *(c)* not fitted marking in their 1995 annual staff report broken down by gender and ethnic grouping; [38134]

(2) if he will list for each traffic area office the annual staff reporting performance and promotion markings received for the various grades in the offices, broken down by gender and ethnic grouping. [38135]

Mr. Bowis: The information cannot be provided in the form requested without identifying individual members of staff.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of the last five years the annual staff performance and promotion markings obtained for grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 in the central transport group. [38136]

Mr. Bowis: I have placed a table containing the information requested in the Library of the House.

Annual Leave

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each agency within his Department and the central transport group, broken down by grade and number, the *(a)* male staff and *(b)* female staff eligible for 30 days' annual leave. [38137]

Mr. Bowis: I have placed a table containing the information requested in the Library of the House.

Staff Statistics

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff were employed by *(a)* the Vehicle Inspectorate and *(b)* the Transport Research Laboratory in each year between 1979 and 1996. [39284]

Mr. Bowis: The average number of staff employed each year by the Vehicle Inspectorate in the period 1986–87 to 1995–96, and by the Transport Research Laboratory in the period 1992–93 to 1995–96, is as set out. Information on staff employed in prior years is not available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

	Vehicle Inspectorate	*Transport Research Laboratory*
1986–87	1,492	—
1987–88	1,530	—
1988–89	1,590	—
1989–90	1,620	—
1990–91	1,651	—
1991–92	1,613	—
1992–93[1]	1,861	625
1993–94	1,768	600
1994–95	1,649	487
1995–96	1,559	432

[1] Responsibility for traffic examiners and some support staff transferred from the central Department to the Vehicle Inspectorate on 1 April 1992.

Bridges

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many bridges are awaiting strengthening work to comply with the EU plan to permit 40 tonne trucks; [38152]

(2) which bridges carrying motorways require strengthening work to comply with the EU plan to permit 40 tonne trucks; and in each case what is the target date for the work to be undertaken. [38153]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent questions asking how many bridges are awaiting strengthening work to comply with the EU plan to permit 40 tonne trucks; which bridges carrying motorways require strengthening work; and what is the target date for the work to be undertaken. This response relates only to the trunk road network; non-trunk roads are the responsibility of local highway authorities.

Trunk road bridges are being assessed to ensure not only that they can carry heavier 40 tonne lorries from 1999 but also that they can continue to carry safely existing 38 tonne lorries. The Highways Agency's aim is to minimise the number of bridges requiring strengthening by putting maximum effort into the assessment process. If a bridge fails an initial assessment, using simple techniques, then an increasingly more sophisticated analysis will be undertaken to ensure that we do not strengthen any bridge unnecessarily. 1,756 trunk road bridges have not yet passed their assessment, but it is expected that only a proportion of these will ultimately require strengthening.

Where there is concern that a bridge may not have sufficient load-carrying capacity, temporary measures are put in place to ensure the safety of road users. The Agency's objective is to make certain that, from 1 January 1999, all vehicles up to and including the new 40 tonne maximum gross vehicle weight standard will be able to use all structures carrying trunk roads and other important routes over trunk roads. The attached list gives details of bridges carrying motorways which we are currently planning to strengthen. In other cases, temporary measures, such as propping, will remain in place until full strengthening can be undertaken.

Motorway underbridges in strengthening programme

Road	*Bridge name*	*Target completion*
A282[1]	Dartford Tunnel East, Kent	September 1998
A282[1]	Essex Viaduct, Essex	September 1998
A1(M)	Otterspool, Hertfordshire	February 1998
A1(M)	Reservoir Railway, South Yorkshire	Not decided
M1	Five Way Flyover North bound, Barnet	June 1997
M1	Five Way Flyover South bound, Barnet	June 1997
M1	Transport Farm Subway, Barnet	1998–99
M1	Berrygrove interchange North Hertfordshire	February 1998
M1	Berrygrove interchange South Hertfordshire	February 1998
M1	Berrygrove interchange North A41, Hertfordshire	February 1998
M1	Berrygrove Service Road South Herfordshire	November 1998
M1	Berrygrove Service Road North Hertfordshire	November 1998
M1	Berrygrove South A41, Hertfordshire	November 1998
M1	Old Paul, South Yorkshire	April 1998
M2	Medway Viaduct East, Kent	March 1998
M2	Medway Viaduct West, Kent	March 1998
M2	Medway River, Kent	March 1998
M4	Grand Union Canal, Hounslow	September 1996
M4	Thames Bray, Berkshire	February 1997
M5	Huntspill River, Somerset	February 1998
M5	River Brue, Somerset	February 1998
M5	Huntworth Viaduct, Somerset	February 1997
M5	River Tone, Somerset	November 1998
M6	Ray Hall Viaduct Bents 12/0-13/10, West Midlands	December 1997
M6	Ray Hall Viaduct Bents 11/0–12/10, West Midlands	June 1998
M11	Woodford West Viaduct, Hertfordshire	November 1998
M40	Tetsworth Pedestrian Underpass, Oxfordshire	Not decided
M40	Stoke Talmage, Oxfordshire	Not decided
M40	Nethercote Lane, Oxfordshire	Not decided
M62	Gelderd Road, West Yorkshire	Not decided
M62	Narrowbeck Railway, West Yorkshire	Not decided
M621	South Leeds interchange 13 Railway	Not decided
M621	Beeston interchange South, West Yorkshire	Not decided
M621	Beeston Interchange North, West Yorkshire	Not decided

[1] These structures are included because they are on the line of M25.

Driver Offences

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions there were for mechanical offences and for drivers' hours and tachograph offences in magistrates and sheriff courts for each of the last five years. [38205]

Mr. Bowis: Information relating to numbers of prosecutions and convictions is contained in Home Office and Scottish Office statistics.

The relevant figures are shown in the tables.

Mechanical offences

	England and Wales[1]		Scotland[2]	
Year	Prosecutions in magistrates' courts	Convictions	Offences prosecuted in sheriffs' courts	Offences proven
1990	89,419	70,838	5,629	4,818
1991	91,809	69,650	5,119	4,284
1992	93,504	67,793	4,772	3,921
1993	87,354	62,336	3,844	3,068
1994	89,643	65,437	3,688	2,915

[1] These figures relate to prosecutions and convictions for offences where a vehicle or vehicle part has been found to be in a dangerous or defective condition including brakes, steering gear, tyres.
[2] These figures are the number of offences under the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989 and the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 prosecuted and proven. In addition, a significant number of offences are handled annually at Scottish District and Stipendiary Magistrates Courts.

Drivers' hours and tachograph offences

	England and Wales[1]		Scotland[2]	
Year	Prosecutions in Magistrates' Courts	Convictions	Offences prosecuted in Sheriffs' Courts	Offences proven
1990	11,557	9,010	1,971	1,649
1991	12,283	9,504	2,115	1,774
1992	12,282	8,943	2,519	2,070
1993	9,817	6,965	1,866	1,534
1994	9,506	6,970	2,301	1,939

[1] These figures are for prosecutions and convictions relating to offences of failure to observe limits on hours of driving and duty or rest requirements.
[2] These figures are the number of offences relating to motor vehicle records of work including tachographs prosecuted and proven. In addition, a significant number of offences are handled annually at Scottish District and Stipendiary Magistrates Courts.

Operators' Licence Fees

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the income raised from the operators' licence fees for each of the last 10 years. [38141]

Mr. Bowis: Allowing for the attribution to the year in question of the five-yearly element of the licence fee, the income generated is as follows:

£

Year	HGV operator licensing	PSV operator licensing	Bus registration
1986–87	Not available	Not available	Not available
1987–88	Not available	3,364,042	582,887
1988–89	12,141,076	4,460,042	609,441
1989–90	14,585,408	2,885,750	715,585
1990–91	13,928,538	3,901,241	691,427
1991–92	14,588,537	3,847,562	673,826
1992–93	15,424,930	3,758,355	633,550
1993–94	19,093,817	3,959,235	668,594
1994–95	21,442,222	4,289,297	779,667
1995–96	22,108,672	4,796,730	720,712

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the annual operator licensing fees for heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles in each of the last 10 years. [38140]

Mr. Bowis: Fees for operator licensing of heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles are as listed.

Heavy Goods Vehicles—Operator Licensing Fees (covering a five year period)

Date	Grant fee (£)	Vehicle fee (£)
From 1 May 1986	20 (grant of licence) 15 (grant of major variation)	100
3 January 1989	60 grant of licence or major variation	100
1 October 1991	70 grant of licence or major variation	140
1 April 1993	170 grant of licence or major variation	140
1 June 1994	185 grant of licence or major variation	160
1 July 1995	185 grant of licence or major variation	170
New Fee structure from 1 January 1996		
	Application for a licence or major variation	160 (one–off)
	Issue of licence	250
	Continuation of licence	250
	Vehicle fee (£34 per annum if paid annually)	140

Public service vehicle—operator licensing fees

Effective date	Fee type	Fee	Period
26 October 1986	Licence Grant	£3.50 per month	For validity of licence (normally 5 years)
	Vehicle discs	£3.50 each	For validity of licence per month (normally 5 years)
	Special licence (for holders of taxi licences)	£40	5 years

Note: Fees to be paid five years in advance to cover period of validity of licence. 1 December 1993 Fees raised, but structure and payment system remained the same:

1 December 1993	Licence grant	£4.50
	Vehicle discs	£4.50

1 January 1996 Fees structure changed with introduction of continuous licensing—some new fees introduced but vehicle disc fees unchanged for operators who elect to pay 5 years fees in advance. Operators paying disc fees on annual basis, pay an increased fee;

1 January 1996	Application for standard licence	£150 one–off fee

Public service vehicle—operator licensing fees

Effective date	*Fee type*	*Fee*	*Period*
	Application for restricted licence	£100 one—off fee	
	Grant charge	£100 First 5 years of licence	
	Continuation in force of licence	£100 subsequent 5 years	
	Application to vary a licence	£75 one—off fee	
	Vehicle discs	£4.50 each per month	If paid 5 years in advance; or
		£5.25 each per month	If paid one year in advance
	Special licence	£40	5 years

Vehicle Inspectorate

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what sums he expects to be spent on the computerisation of enforcement intelligence by the Vehicle Inspectorate and the traffic area offices during 1996–97. [38149]

Mr. Bowis: I have nothing to add to the answer given on 22 March 1996, *Official Report*, column *387*.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what resources have been allocated to the Vehicle Inspectorate for roadworthiness enforcement spot checks in each of the last 10 years. [38148]

Mr. Bowis: Figures for years before 1991–92 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Figures for the last five years for all types of vehicles are as follows:

Year	*Budgets for roadworthiness spot checks on GB and foreign vehicles (£)*
1991–92	2,612,000
1992–93	3,673,000
1993–94	2,777,000
1994–95	3,011,000
1995–96	3,211,000

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in his name, or that of other Ministers in his Department, for meetings with Conservative Members immediately preceding questions to his Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39518]

Sir George Young: Nil.

London Transport

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the levels of investment in London Transport in (i) 1992-293, (ii) 1993–94 and (iii) 1994–95. [39296]

Mr. Bowis: The information requested is in the table, in both outturn and constant prices:

Investment in London Transport 1992–93 to 1994–95

Year	*Investment (£ million) outturn*	*Investment (£ million)—1996–97 prices*
1992–93	789	873
1993–94	821	883
1994–95	955	1,008

Catalytic Converters

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many cars in the United Kingdom are currently fitted with catalytic converters. [39290]

Mr. Bowis: It is estimated that there are some 5 million cars in the United Kingdom currently fitted with catalytic converters.

Franchising Director

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish the franchising director's annual report for 1995–96 made to him under section 75 of the Railways Act 1993. [39990]

Sir George Young: I have today laid before Parliament the franchising director's annual report for 1995–96, which records the very good progress achieved in franchising during that period. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Fishburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further instructions he has issued to the franchising director. [40029]

Sir George Young: I have today written to the franchising director instructing him under section 5 of the Railways Act 1993 to take into account any Government policies which are relevant to the provision of passenger services insofar as they affect, or may be affected by, the fulfilment of his objectives. I am placing a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Harbour Order, Southampton

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has reached a decision after the public inquiry into the proposal by Associated British Ports for a harbour order to extend the limits of the port of Southampton to include the western Solent. [39938]

Sir George Young: I have agreed with the inspector that the order should not be made. I have considered the reasons for making it and taken careful note of the arguments put forward by the applicants and their supporters and by the objectors. I agreed with the inspector that the order is unnecessary, and that none of the concerns in the case for the order is so important, or incapable of resolution by current practices or regulations.

Business Aviation

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for enhancing facilities for business aviation at RAF Northolt; and if he will make a statement. [39914]

Mr. Bowis: The Department of Transport has confirmed to the Transport Select Committee that it does not consider Northolt to be a suitable site for the development of a civil airport on the scale that would be necessary to provide significant relief to Heathrow, as the Committee had supported. However, RAF Northolt does have the potential to provide useful, if limited, facilities for business aviation.

The Government have made clear their recognition that business aviation can bring economic and wider benefits to national competitiveness as well as to local and regional economies. Whilst they would not subsidise the necessary facilities, Government are keen to ensure that the industry is not unreasonably denied access to capacity.

The pressure on runway capacity in the south-east of England has already led to RAF Northolt becoming an increasingly attractive option for business aviation seeking access to London. The Government have been considering how the needs of business aviation can best be accommodated alongside the continuing military requirements at the station. Last year the Government announced they would not proceed with the option of a separate civil enclave at RAF Northolt; consultation with interested parties had shown that the high capital costs and physical constraints would not make it commercially viable. Instead, the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Transport have been working jointly to identify possible changes to working arrangements at the station to improve the service offered to users and to businesses in the south-east more generally.

The two Departments are now able to announce a package of practical measures which arise from further consultation with existing users of the aerodrome, but which also recognise the concerns of the local communities about the impact of aviation activities. We believe these measures respond to the needs of the business aviation industry while preserving RAF Northolt's operational effectiveness and safeguarding the interests of local people.

The key element of the package is an extension to the station's operating hours of one hour each weekday morning, on a trial basis. From 1 October 1996 RAF Northolt will open for civil use at 0700, rather than 0800 as at present. There will be no change to the closing time of 2000, or to the standard closure at weekends, nor will the existing arrangements under which military operations take precedence be affected. This change will give business aviation extra flexibility, and in particular it will make it able to deliver its customers to European destinations early enough to meet continental business schedules. Air traffic control constraints will in any case limit the use that can be made of the extra hour.

Over the coming months MOD and DOT will closely monitor the number of civil movements to assess the amount of flexibility provided by the existing movement limit; in the meantime, the station will continue to operate on the basis of a maximum of 7,000 civil movements per year. This figure includes business aviation and other civil operations, but excludes movements on MOD or other Government business. The station expects around 6,000 civil movements in the current financial year.

The extended opening hours will begin on a trial basis for six months. MOD and DOT will be assessing the practical impact of the change, on the industry and on local residents as well as on the station itself, before a decision on its continuation is taken.

The other elements of the package, whose impact will largely be restricted to the users themselves, will not form part of that review. In addition to minor operational improvements at the station, there will be readiness on the part of the MOD to consider any proposals from private sector operators to utilise currently unused areas of the RAF Northolt site to establish their own hangars, subject to operational considerations. This would mean that civil users could in the long-term base some of their aircraft on site, thus reducing the need for positioning movements at the beginning and end of the day. Responsibility for taking forward any such development through the necessary planning procedures would of course rest with the civil promoter.

Bom Rei Dredger

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans his Department has to investigate the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the dredger, Bom Rei. [39287]

Mr. Bowis: None. The Bom Rei, formerly the Bowbelle, was registered under the Portuguese flag. The Portuguese authorities will be investigating the incident. The marine accident investigation branch has no jurisdiction to carry out an investigation into an incident involving a foreign flagged vessel sailing outside UK territorial waters. The MAIB has, however, provided the Portuguese authorities with a copy of the MAIB report into the Bowsprite, a sister ship, which was lost off the coast of Belgium in 1988.

Trunk Roads

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many contractors were subject to financial penalties for late completion of contracted works on the trunk road network; and what was the additional revenue raised from those penalties, in each year since 1991. [39291]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Glenda Jackson, dated 24 July 1996:

As you know, the Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many contractors were subject to financial penalties for late completion of contracted works on the trunk road network; and what was the additional revenue raised from those penalties, in each year since 1991.

The information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Rail Coaches

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many passenger rail coaches were in service in each of the last five years. [39036]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* The number of passenger rail coaches 31 March in each of the last five years is as follows:

1992: 12,925

1993: 12,309

1994: 11,802

1995: 11,483

1996: 9,928

The declining trend is due mainly to the introduction of new rolling stock, which is of a higher seating capacity and is more efficient to use, permitting operators to replace older stock with fewer new units. The larger drop in 1996 arises because of changes to the statistical base. Prior to 1996, all British Rail vehicles were included in annual statistics. The 1996 figure includes only those currently in service with BR and franchise operators.

Road Signs

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the current provision of road signage on the road network marking the border between *(a)* England and Scotland and *(b)* England and Wales. [38631]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 24 July 1996:

As you know, I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Transport to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the current provision of road signage on the road network marking the border between (a) England and Scotland and (b) England and Wales.

The current provision of signs on the trunk road network marking the English border is as follows:

Road	*Sign type*	*Legend*
(a) *Border between England and Scotland*		
A1	(i) White on brown	English Border 1 mile
	(ii) White on brown	English Border
	(iii) Stone	England
	(iv) Black on white	Welcome to Northumberland England's Border Country Borough of Berwick on Tweed
A68	(i) White on brown	English Border 1 mile
	(ii) Stone	England
A7	Blue on white	England (with St. George's shield)
A74	White on brown	Welcome to England, Cumbria and the Lake District (with county crest)
(b) *Border between England and Wales*		
A550[1], A55, A483	Black on white	England Cheshire (with St. George's shield and county crest)
A5	Black on white	Welcome to Shropshire
A483	(i) Slate	Welcome to Shropshire
	(ii) Black on white	You are now entering Shropshire and Oswestry Borough Council
A458	Black on white	Welcome to Shropshire(with county crest)
A465, A40	Black on white	The County of Hereford and Worcester Welcome to England (with red rose symbol and county crest)
A48	(i) Black on white, blue border	The County of Gloucestershire Welcome to England (in English and Welsh) (with red rose symbol and county crest)
	(ii) White on blue	Welcome to Gloucestershire (with county crest)
M48, M49, M4	Black on white	Welcome to England (in English and Welsh) (with red rose symbol)

[1] The sign on the A550 has been temporarily removed because of major roadworks.

Dartford River Crossing Ltd.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the level of interest payments required to service the capital for the Dartford River Crossing Ltd. using *(a)* the interest rate set out in schedule 10 to the agreement with Dartford River Crossing Ltd. and *(b)* the interest rate which the Government would reasonably expect to pay if they had raised the capital themselves showing in both cases the size of interest payments for (i) each year of the project and (ii) the whole life of the project. [39019]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the level of interest payments required to service the capital for the Dartford River Crossing Ltd.

The likely level of interest payments necessary to finance Dartford River Crossing Ltd's proposals to design, build, finance and operate the new Queen Elizabeth II Bridge and to operate and maintain the existing Dartford Tunnels was considered as part of the overall financial and technical assessment undertaken in August 1986 when the decision was taken to procure this project in the private, rather than the public sector. For obvious commercial reasons, you will appreciate that the actual figures used in this assessment are confidential.

Coastguard

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what estimate he has made of the reduction in the number of full-time coastguard officer posts from the implementation of "Focus for Change"; [39379]

(2) what accommodation facilities are provided for the crew of the helicopter search and rescue centre at Portland; and if the crew are accommodated overnight; [39370]

(3) how many *(a)* coastguard officers and *(b)* auxiliary coastguards were employed at each coastguard station in each of the last five years; [39480]

(4) if he will list by coastguard station the number of false alarms received by the global maritime distress safety system for each of the last 12 months; and what action he intends to take to reduce the number; [39372]

(5) what training is *(a)* required for coastguard officers and *(b)* provided to auxiliary coastguards before they take up their post; [39476]

(6) if he will list for each of the last 12 months, by coastguard station, the dates when the station was staffed below the recognised minimum staffing level and by how many staff the station was understaffed; [39357]

(7) what assessment he has made of the savings to *(a)* the Coastguard agency and *(b)* his Department from implementation of the focus for change report into the Coastguard agency; [39477]

(8) what estimate he has made of the effect on the take off times of search and rescue helicopters at Portland of the crew not being based at the search and rescue centre. [39371]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to a number of your recent Questions which are primarily matters for the Coastguard Agency.

PQ 39379

Focus for Change will, in fact, result in a net increase of approximately eight full time posts.

PQ 39370

The accommodation provided at the Coastguard helicopter unit at Portland consists of four modern portakabins comprising: kitchen; rest room (TV/Radio etc.); operations room; Senior Pilots office; Chief Engineers office; storage space for personal effects (flying suits/helmets etc.); aircraft Hangar; car parking spaces. The crew are not accommodated overnight.

PQ 39480

The number of Coastguard Officers employed by the Department of Transport and subsequently by the Coastguard Agency in the last five years are given below. The figures up to April 1993, pre-Agency, are only available on a Regional basis.

Region	*1 April 1992*	*1 April 1993*
Dover	81	80
Falmouth	66	68
Swansea	92	89
Clyde	79	76
Aberdeen	86	82
Yarmouth	62	64
Total	466	459

The figures for the next three years are available on a station by station basis.

Station (MRSC)	*1 April 1994*	*1 April 1995*	*1 April 1996*
Dover	31	29	27
Thames	21	18	20
Solent	27	25	23
Portland	21	20	21
Brixham	21	18	19
Falmouth	25	25	25
Swansea	25	25	24
Milford Haven	18	19	19
Holyhead	19	17	17
Liverpool	22	21	19
Clyde	19	19	19
Oban	16	17	16
Belfast	17	18	19
Stornoway	16	17	18
Pentland	18	16	17
Shetland	15	16	16
Aberdeen	29	25	28
Forth	19	17	18
Tyne Tees	20	19	19
Humber	23	22	21
Yarmouth	22	22	21
Total	444	425	426

Figures for the regional coastguard stations

Station (MRCC)	*1 April 1994*	*1 April 1995*	*1 April 1996*
Dover	2	2	2
Falmouth	2	2	2
Swansea	2	3	2
Clyde	2	2	1
Aberdeen	2	2	2
Yarmouth	2	2	2
Total	12	13	11

These figures include Regional and Deputy Regional Controllers only. The Agency does not employ any Auxiliary Coastguards, they are all volunteers.

PQ 39372

All GMDSS alerts received via INMARSAT, 121.5MHz, 243MHz and 406MHz are processed by the Coastguard Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre at Falmouth. GMDSS alerts received via Medium Frequency Digital Selective Calling (MF DSC) may be picked up simultaneously by several stations. In order to ensure there is no duplication of alerts, MRCC Falmouth collate the alerts (including false alarms) from the 8 other MF DSC stations around the UK. The number of false alerts received in the last 12 months are as follows:

	INMARSAT	*121.5MHz*	*243MHz*	*406MHz*	*MFDSC*	*Monthly total*
July 1995	31	8	10	31	7	87
August 1995	38	13	9	25	2	87
September 1995	26	10	2	28	8	74
October 1995	50	8	8	22	13	101
November 1995	42	22	8	16	7	95
December 1995	29	8	6	18	16	77
January 1996	24	14	6	24	10	78
February 1996	29	13	3	23	15	83
March 1996	32	6	2	23	16	79
April 1996	29	6	4	22	10	71
May 1996	38	7	4	20	6	75
June 1996	48	15	3	19	1	86
Totals	416	130	65	271	111	993

The Marine Safety Agency (MSA) are taking a number of measures to reduce the number of false alerts on GMDSS. These include:

issuing an Merchant Shipping Notice detailing the measures to prevent false alerts and making it widely available to the marine community;

contributing to the examiners panel for operator examinations and introducing the topic of preventing false alarms into the examination syllabus;

taking an active role in the International Standardisation bodies which produce equipment specifications for marine radio and have introduced improved requirements to make the equipment more foolproof. MSA have also contributed to a national specification for a leisure market GMDSS radio which is based on simple, foolproof operation.

PQ 39476

All new entrant Coastguards undertake an initial training lasting approximately one year. After a short familiarisation period (usually six to eight weeks) at their parent station, they undertake six weeks intensive training at the Coastguard Training Centre. They then return to their parent station for about nine months, during which time, under the guidance of the District Management Team, they work through a taskbook compiled by the Training Centre. They return to the Training Centre for a two week revision and examination period at the end of the year. Subject to successful completion of the taskbook, the exams, an interview board and management reports, they are appointed Coastguard Watch Officers.

Auxiliary Coastguard Operations Room Assistants receive up to 80 hours initial training locally during which time they are supernumery to the normal staff. They are required to pass examinations before being allowed to become a part of the watch. They receive 20 hours refresher training per annum thereafter.

PQ 39357

The information relating to dates when Coastguard stations were staffed below the recognised minimum staffing level is not readily available and will take time to compile. I will write separately when it is available.

PQ 39477

The financial effect of the introduction of Focus for Change will result in an overall reduction in costs as a result of more flexible shift patterns and reductions in overtime and payments to auxiliaries.

PQ 39371

The Portland SAR helicopter is on 15 minutes notice throughout the day, during which time the duty crew are permanently on station. There is no effect on take off times.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for the contracting out of Coastguard services. [39479]

Mr. Bowis: Coastguard has already contracted out much of its support services and its chief executive is considering the possibility of contracting out aspects of the agency's training services.

Driver Fatigue

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the extent to which driver fatigue was a significant contributory factor among *(a)* heavy goods drivers and *(b)* public service vehicles in the cause of road accidents involving (i) fatal, (ii) serious and (iii) slight injuries. [38201]

Mr. Bowis: A recent survey of heavy goods vehicle and car drivers found that tiredness was a principal factor in around 10 per cent. of accidents. The survey did not cover public service vehicle drivers. The survey included both damage-only and injury accidents. The number of fatal and serious accidents was too small to draw separate conclusions about.

Air Safety

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will require air travel organisers' licence holders to ensure that all aircraft which they charter meet the United Kingdom standards of United Kingdom passenger liability insurance. [39360]

Mr. Bowis: No. My Department already requires evidence of adequate insurance to meet potential liabilities before granting permission for foreign aircraft to operate passenger services to and from the United Kingdom. However, the liability of air carriers in the event of loss or accident is a matter for each contracting state to determine in respect of its own carriers subject to minima, agreed internationally under the Warsaw convention.

Ferry Safety

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the countries that have signed the Stockholm agreement relating to ferry safety; and when the agreement comes into effect. [39392]

Mr. Bowis: As of 23 July 1996, the agreement had been signed by the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. The agreement will come into effect on 1 April 1997.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date he expects all the requirements of the Stockholm agreement relating to ferry safety to have been met. [39393]

Mr. Bowis: The requirements of the Stockholm agreement will be implemented on a progressive basis between 1 April 1997 and 1 October 2002, in accordance with the internationally agreed timetable.

Fuel Consumption (New Cars)

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the average mileage per gallon for new cars bought in Britain *(a)* in 1975, *(b)* in 1985 and *(c)* in 1995. [39841]

Mr. Bowis: The first year when average fuel consumption was calculated was 1978. The figure for 1995 is not yet available, but for 1978, 1985 and 1994, the figures are 30.91, 37.53 and 36.73 miles per gallon respectively.

Port Waste Management Plans

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to establish a formal approval process for individual port waste management plans; if he will examine the need for additional resources for the Marine Safety Agency to carry out an approval process; and if he will make a statement. [39676]

Mr. Bowis: Guidelines issued by the Marine Safety Agency require local consultation between ports and their regular users in the preparation of port waste management

plans. We are currently consulting on proposed primary legislation which would enable the MSA to ensure that there is compliance with these guidelines.

Accident Costs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the cost of an accident resulting in *(a)* fatal, *(b)* serious and *(c)* slight injury. [38204]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) on 16 April 1996, *Official Report*, column *509*.

Wheel Loss

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column *5*, when he intends to update the information leaflet outlining aspects of wheel loss and suggesting ways of dealing with the problem. [38213]

Mr. Bowis: The British standard code of practice for the selection and care of tyres and wheels for commercial vehicles, BS AU50 part 2 section 7a, was published on 15 December 1995. The Department's leaflet will be revised to reflect the guidance in the code of practice and it is intended to issue the leaflet by the end of October 1996.

Vehicle Fuel Trials

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the results of the trials on the use of *(a)* liquefied petroleum gas, *(b)* compressed natural gas, *(c)* biodiesel, *(d)* city-diesel and *(e)* electric vehicles were concluded; and when the plans to publish them. [39755]

Mr. Bowis: The alternative fuels trails are not due for completion until the end of this year. Results will be published in the spring of 1997.

Diesel Vehicles

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many urban-based heavy and car diesel vehicles are currently licensed; and what was the figure 10 years ago. [39754]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Figures for registered keepers of diesel-powered vehicles in Great Britain for 1985 and 1995, with those in London boroughs and former metropolitan counties at the end of 1995, are as follows:

Total diesel registered keepers (thousands)	*Private and light goods*	*Heavy goods vehicles*	*Others*	*All*
End of 1985	396	497	584	1,477
End of 1995	3,094	415	564	4,073
End of 1995 data:				
London	242	33	27	301
Manchester	155	26	12	193
Merseyside	48	7	8	62
South Yorkshire	67	10	11	88
Tyne and Wear	42	5	7	54
West Midlands	221	29	13	263
West Yorkshire	106	17	12	135

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the length of time required after the introduction of European directives 1 and 2 concerning the reduction in emission from diesel vehicles for the entire United Kingdom fleet to comply with the lower limits. [39762]

Mr. Bowis: Departmental models used to estimate emissions from the diesel vehicle fleet assume that fewer than 2 per cent. of cars, heavy lorries and buses will fail to comply with the more stringent standards after 15, 16 and 19 years respectively. Since buses are commonly re-engined, the latter figure should be treated with caution.

Passenger Aircraft

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many passenger aircraft more than *(a)* 15, *(b)* 20 and *(c)* 25 years old are registered by the Civil Aviation Authority. [39025]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* The information, drawn from the UK register of civil aircraft as at 22 July 1996, is set out in the table:

Aircraft over 5,700 kg maximum take-off weight with a Transport Category (Passenger) Certificate of Airworthiness

Construction date	*Number on the UK register of civil aircraft*
1977 to 1981	85
1972 to 1976	34
Before 1972	88

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many passenger aircraft more than *(a)* 15, *(b)* 20 and *(c)* 25 years old are in service with (i) Air 2000, (ii) Air UK, (iii) Virgin, (iv) British Midland and (v) British Airways. [39024]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* The information, drawn from the UK register of civil aircraft as at 22 July 1996, is set out in the table:

Aircraft over 5,700kg maximum take-off weight with a Transport Category (Passenger) Certificate of Airworthiness

Airline	*Number of aircraft Constructed 1977 to 1981*	*Constructed 1972 to 1976*	*Constructed before 1972*
Air 2000	0	0	0
Air UK	1	0	6
British Airways	38	15	7

Aircraft over 5,700kg maximum take-off weight with a Transport Category (Passenger) Certificate of Airworthiness

Airline	Number of aircraft Constructed 1977 to 1981	Constructed 1972 to 1976	Constructed before 1972
British Midlands Airways	0	0	0
Virgin Atlantic Airways	0	3	3

Contractors (Financial Penalties)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many contractors were subject to financial penalties for late completion of contracted works on the trunk road network; and what was the additional revenue raised from those penalties, in each year since 1991. [39291]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Glenda Jackson, dated 24 July 1996:

As you know, the Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many contractors were subject to financial penalties for late completion of contracted works on the trunk road network; and what was the additional revenue raised from those penalties, in each year since 1991.

The information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Search and Rescue

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the action his Department has taken for each of the recommendations made in (i) the Transport Committee's first report of Session 1994–95, on the future of the Coastguard Service (HC89) and (ii) the Transport Committee's first report of Session 1993–94 on the provision of search and rescue services (HC95). [39373]

Mr. Bowis: (i) The report made no specific recommendations.

(ii) An interdepartmental review group was set up in July 1995 to examine the national requirement for search and rescue helicopters. The group has submitted its report and a copy has been placed in the Library. A formal consultation was undertaken on the conclusions of the report and on the future locations of search and rescue helicopters on the south coast. We are currently considering the results of that consultation.

Flight Statistics

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the percentage of flights operated on scheduled services by British Airways and its franchises from *(a)* all United Kingdom airports, *(b)* London area airports and *(c)* Heathrow and Gatwick. [39500]

Mr. Bowis: In 1995, British Airways and its franchisees operated 38 per cent. of lights from all United Kingdom airports, 37 per cent. of those from London area airports and 42 per cent. of those at Heathrow or Gatwick taken together.

Civil Aviation Authority

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will require the Civil Aviation Authority to give greater representation on its board to passenger representatives. [39463]

Mr. Bowis: No. The board is not designed to represent specific groups. Passenger interests are safeguarded in other ways. For example, there exists the Air Transport Users Council which was set up by the CAA in 1973 to assist it in safeguarding the interests of airline users, as well as advising the CAA on matters of interest to air transport users.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent review he has conducted of the role, functions and structure of the non-ATC related parts of the Civil Aviation Authority; and if he will make a statement. [39461]

Mr. Bowis: The Department is currently reviewing the role of the economic regulation group of the Civil Aviation Authority and its relations with the Department of Transport and other agencies. No decisions have yet been reached on the review's conclusions.

Roads (Expenditure)

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to ensure that the reduction in planned expenditure on roads will not have an adverse effect on *(a)* routine maintenance of motorways and trunk roads, *(b)* road marking and traffic sign replacement, *(c)* grass cutting, litter collection and scavenging and *(d)* road safety measures; and if he will make a statement. [39266]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Simon Coombs, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent question asking how he proposes to ensure that the reduction in planned expenditure on roads will not have an adverse effect on *(a)* routine maintenance of motorways and trunk roads, *(b)* road marking and traffic sign replacement, *(c)* grass cutting, litter collection and scavenging, and *(d)* road safety measures.

The Highways Agency has reacted professionally and methodically to the reductions in funds available for trunk roads in the financial year 1996/97. As regards routine maintenance, we have identified and discussed with our Maintenance Agents areas of work where a temporary reduction in, or cessation of, activity would have least effect on safety and serviceability. For example, grass cutting will only be carried out where necessary to maintain safety and litter collecting and scavenging only as necessary for safety or to meet the requirements of environmental legislation.

Programmes of capital maintenance works have been thoroughly examined, using value management and value engineering techniques, to ensure that the Agency's prime objectives of safety and serviceability are achieved as economically as possible. Some schemes, providing good value for money, have had to be postponed until next year.

We have made a small contingency provision to ensure that all urgent safety problems will be investigated and work essential to maintaining safety will be carried out.

Road Surfaces

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future use of porous asphalt and whisper concrete as surfaces on motorways and trunk roads. [39494]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question on the future use of porous asphalt and whisper concrete as surfaces on motorways and trunk roads.

It is the Agency's standard practice to invite bids for road construction leaving the tenderers as many options to choose from as is technically possible. In the case of porous asphalt its use has been permitted since 1993. Its adoption is encouraged where conditions are technically suitable and where the benefits can be shown to outweigh the higher costs associated with its use.

In the case of whisper concrete following the successful completion of trials its use was permitted from this Spring as an option for all trunk roads and motorways. Where flows exceed 75,000 vehicles per day whisper concrete is the only permitted concrete running surface.

M6 and M1 (Congestion)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the implications for congestion on the M6 and M1 of the use of Heathrow and Gatwick airports by passengers from northern England. [39402]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking what assessment he has made of the implications for congestion on the M6 and M1 of the use of Heathrow and Gatwick Airports by passengers from northern England.

We have made no such assessment.

M6

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress made in the review to determine the practicality of small-scale improvements on the M6 between the west midlands and the north-west, announced in the document, "Managing the Trunk Road Programme;" and if these schemes are considered main programme or longer term schemes. [39493]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about M6 widening.

We have made good progress with the reviews of the widening schemes between Junctions 11 and 16 in Staffordshire and Junctions 16 and 19 in Cheshire.

The reviews aim to reduce the scale and impact of the schemes, obtain best value for money and to protect the environment. All objections and comments on the published schemes are being taken into account as part of the review.

The M6 in the West Midlands and the North West is a strategically important route in need of additional capacity. The widening schemes between these junctions are in the main programme.

Road Programme

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of schemes in the current road programme which have had their route protection orders removed; and what effects this will have on their programmes for construction. [39492]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking if he will list the number of schemes in the current road programme which have had their route protection orders removed; and what effects this will have on their programmes for construction.

For schemes in the current main programme no route protection notifications to local authorities have been removed. For schemes in the longer term programme, I have set out the schemes which have had their route protection withdrawn. Given current funding constraints, preparation work on all schemes in the longer term programme has been stopped and will be brought forward only after substantial progress has been made with the main programme.

A2 Kidbrooke Park Road Interchange improvement

A23 Handcross–Warninglid

A40 Witney–Cassington

A40 Witney–Stuart Farm

A46 Upper Swainswick–Pennsylvania

A46 Pennsylvania–Tormarton

M27 Junction 4 to 11

Air Travel (Staff)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate his Department has made of the number of people employed by *(a)* airlines and *(b)* airports in the United Kingdom. [39509]

Mr. Bowis: Statistics on employment in air transport in the UK can be found in "Transport Statistics Great Britain 1995", table 1.26.

Disabled Passengers

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will encourage United Kingdom airports to spread charges for handling of disabled passengers across all passengers. [39506]

Mr. Bowis: This is a commercial matter for aiports and airlines to decide.

Air Accidents Investigation Branch Report

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to publish the air accidents investigation branch report into the engine failure suffered by a Boeing 737, registration No. G-OBMM in 1995. [39369]

Mr. Bowis: The report will be published on Thursday 25 July 1996.

Commercial Airlines (Revenue)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the total revenues received by the Civil Aviation Authority and National Air Traffic Services from commercial airlines for the most recent year for which data are available. [39462]

Mr. Bowis: The CAA has assessed that, in 1995–96 £464.4 million was received, of which £428.3 million was received by NATS.

Roadside Checks

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (a) how many roadside spot checks are planned to be undertaken in Scotland by Vehicle Inspectorate officers during 1996–97; [38209]

(2) how many *(a)* heavy goods vehicles and *(b)* public service vehicles were (i) examined at roadside spot checks and (ii) issued with immediate prohibition notices by Vehicle Inspectorate enforcement officers broken down by traffic area office in each of the last five years;[38150]

(3) how many heavy goods vehicles were weighed by the Vehicle Inspectorate for each of the last five years; [38210]

(4) if he will list the 10 most common mechanical defects found on *(a)* heavy goods vehicles and *(b)* public service vehicles at roadside spot checks; [38211]

(5) what actions are available to enforcement officers when an unlicensed heavy goods vehicle is discovered at a roadside check. [38145]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question on:

1 The 10 most common mechanical defects found at roadside spot checks;

2 The number of HGVs weighed for the last 5 years';

3 Action available to enforcement officers if an unlicensed HGV is discovered at a roadside check;

4 The number of HGVs and PSVs issued with immediate prohibitions at roadside checks by traffic area for the last 5 years; and

5 The number of roadside spot checks planned for Scotland in 1996/97.

Information on the 10 most common mechanical defects at roadside spot checks for HGVs and PSVs can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The number of HGVs weighed by VI for each of the last 5 years was:

1991/92: 119,758

1992/93: 124,004

1993/94: 100,453

1994/95: 120,297

1995/96: 107,417

Details of the number of HGVs and PSVs i. examined at roadside spot checks and ii. issued with immediate prohibition notices in each of the last 5 years are shown in the attached table.

If enforcement officers discover an unlicensed heavy goods vehicle at a roadside check they can report the operator for prosecution or for investigation. If the vehicle stopped has serious roadworthiness defects and the operator is unlicensed, the vehicle will be prohibited and the operator will be prosecuted for the mechanical defects and the unauthorised use of the vehicle.

The number of roadside spot checks planned for Scotland is 587 (including special multi-agency checks). The numbers planned may vary, for example because of weather conditions or availability of the police. Checks in addition to these may also be arranged if police resources allow or if we are asked by the Department to carry out any particular special checks.

(a) HGV

	(i) Spot checks	*(ii) Immediate prohibitions*
1995–96		
Scotland	10,932	977
North West	20,682	1,785
North East	18,958	1,672
Western	18,354	1,550
South Wales	5,583	357
West Midlands	13,201	1,217
East	21,119	1,235
South East	16,434	1,416
National	125,286	10,209
1994–95		
Scotland	13,278	844
North West	22,565	1,703
North East	18,577	1,377
Western	19,395	1,482
South Wales	5,571	278
West Midlands	12,641	1,161
East	19,961	1,412
South East	18,047	1,446
National	130,035	9,703
1993–94		
Scotland	19,141	1,330
North West	22,728	1,377
North East	15,402	1,279
Western	18,818	1,404
South Wales	9,398	473
West Midlands	15,348	878
East	19,106	1,358
South East	14,325	852
National	134,266	8,951
1992–93		
Scotland	13,588	1,258
North West	24,313	1,510
North East	20,291	1,141
Western	16,472	1,275
South Wales	5,889	457
West Midlands	10,145	740
East	25,593	1,516
South East	18,090	1,271
National	134,381	9,168
1991–92		
Scotland	10,684	1,020
North West	19,244	1,504
North East	17,021	1,214
Western	13,609	1,072
South Wales and West Midlands	15,205	1,281
East	28,315	1,631
South East	13,403	960
National	117,461	8,682

(b) PSV

	(i) Spot checks	(ii) Immediate prohibitions
1995–96		
Scotland	4,377	288
North West	5,656	455
North East	6,145	285
Western	3,816	197
South Wales	1,837	59
West Midlands	3,003	103
East	4,777	169
South East	4,516	174
National	34,127	1,730
1994–95		
Scotland	4,020	203
North West	6,261	432
North East	6,006	240
Western	2,933	155
South Wales	1,821	68
West Midlands	2,441	96
East	3,768	174
South East	5,576	277
National	32,826	1,645
1993–94		
Scotland	4,292	234
North West	5,191	316
North East	4,604	277
Western	2,947	89
South Wales	2,035	81
West Midlands	3,491	86
East	3,060	150
South East	4,066	164
National	29,686	1,397
1992–93		
Scotland	4,059	264
North West	4,813	245
North East	4,237	138
Western	2,883	139
South Wales	1,853	110
West Midlands	2,471	68
East	2,995	124
South East	6,231	211
National	29,542	1,299
1991–92		
Scotland	3,105	304
North West	2,650	257
North East	3,594	163
Western	2,081	144
South Wales and West Midlands	3,989	182
East	2,698	178
South East	2,989	245
National	21,106	1,473

Bypasses and Service Stations

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the *(a)* road bypasses and *(b)* motorway service stations constructed in each financial year since 1991–92 together with their cost and location. [39288]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Glenda Jackson, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking if he will list the (a) road bypasses and (b) motorway service stations constructed in each financial year since 1991–92 together with their cost and location.

I have set out the bypasses and motorway service areas built since 1991–92 according to the financial year in which construction was completed. Since motorway service areas are built by private sector operators and the costs fall to them rather than the public purse, there is no comprehensive record of construction costs.

Bypasses constructed in each financial year since 1991–92

Title	Location	Works cost
1991–92		
A11 Red Lodge Bypass	Suffolk	5.6
A14 Kettering Southern Bypass	Northamptonshire	36.7
A16 Louth Bypass	Lincolnshire	5.6
A27 Brighton and Hove Bypass (Dyke Road–Patchem and Hangleton–Dyke Road)	East Sussex	34.7
A30 Zelah Bypass	Cornwall	3.9
A35 Axminster Bypass	Devon	10.4
A43 Blisworth and Milton Maisor Bypass	Northamptonshire	17.2
A47 Castor—Ailsworth Bypass	Cambridgeshire	9.0
A47 Eye Bypass	Cambridgeshire	7.2
A518 Etwall Bypass	Derbyshire	3.5
A59 Mellor Brook Bypass	Lancashire	2.6
A595 Hensingham Bypass	Cumbria	7.4
A6 Burton Latimer Bypass	Northamptonshire	2.3
A6 Quorn—Mount Sorrel Bypass	Leicestershire	34.2
A65 Draughton Bypass	North Yorkshire	3.0
A650 Drighlington Bypass	Leeds	7.0
A69 Brampton Bypass	Cumbria	5.8
Total		196.1
1992–93		
A16 Ludborough Bypass	Lincolnshire	1.9
A16 Stickford Bypass	Lincolnshire	1.3
A27 Brighton and Hove Bypass (Patchem-Coldeen)	East Sussex	21.1
A3 Liphook–Peterborough Bypasses	Hampshire	54.1
A3 Milford Bypass	Surrey	9.4
A41 Whitchurch Bypass	Shropshire	13.7
A420 Kingston Bagpuize and Southmoor Bypass	Oxfordshire	6.0
A47 Narborough Bypass	Norfolk	2.8
A47 Norwich Southern Bypass	Norfolk	11.5
A5 Little Brickhill Bypass	Buckinghamshire	7.8
A523 Macclesfield Relief Road (Bypass)	Cheshire	29.2
A5A49 Telford–Shrewsbury Bypass	Shropshire	79.0
A6 Market Harborough Bypass	Leicestershire	10.3
Total		248.0
1993–94		
A14 Kettering Northern Bypass	Northampton	7.6
A27 Crossbush Bypass	West Sussex	4.4
A27 Westhampnett Bypass	West Sussex	10.6
A39 Wadebridge Bypass	Cornwall	10.7
A41 Berkhamsted Bypass	Hertfordshire	23.9
A41 Kings Langley Bypass	Hertfordshire	27.2
A41/A421 Bicester Bypass Stage 2 (A421 Bicester–Wendlebury (M40))	Oxfordshire	4.0
A590 Dalton in Furness Bypass	Cumbria	9.0
A595 Egremont Bypass	Cumbria	9.8
A596 Wigton Bypass	Cumbria	6.9
Total		114.1
1994–95		
A17 Leadenham Bypass	Lincolnshire	3.3
A19 Easingwold Bypass	North Yorkshire	4.6
A568 Widnes Eastern Bypass (North)	Cheshire	14.6
A66 Stainmore–Banksgate Bypass	Cumbria	7.7
Total		30.2

Bypasses constructed in each financial year since 1991–92

Title	*Location*	*Works cost*
1995–96		
A17 Wigtoft—Sutterton Bypass	Lincolnshire	4.4
A27 Brighton and Hove Bypass (Kingston–Hangleton)	East Sussex	19.5
A30/A39 Indian Queens, Fraddon and St Columb Road Bypass	Cornwall	12.7
A417 Brockworth Bypass	Gloucestershire	36.0
A46 Leicester Western Bypass	Leicestershire	36.0
A46 Norton—Lenchwick Bypass	Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcestershire	19.2
A5 Fazeley, Two Gates and Wilnecote Bypass	Staffordshire	26.0
A564 Foston, Hatton, Hilton Bypass	Derbyshire	19.4
A65 Burley in Wharfedale Bypass	Bradford MB	5.5
Total		178.7

MOTORWAY SERVICE AREAS CONSTRUCTED IN EACH FINANCIAL YEAR SINCE 1991–92

1991–92: None

1992–93: None

1993–94: Strensham northbound replacement (M5 between Junctions 7 and 8)

Tebay east (M6 between Junctions 38 and 39)

Clacket Lane (M40 Junction 10)

Cherwell Valley (M40 Junction 10)

1994–95: Durham A1 (M)

Warwick (M40 between Junctions 12 and 13)

1995–96: Reading (M4 between Junctions 11 and 12)

Strafford north (M6 between Junction 14 and 15)

Birchanger Green (M11 Junction 8)

1996–97: None.

WALES

Animal Welfare

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the animal welfare issues for which his Department has responsibility. [34284]

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 25 June 1996]:* The Welsh Office has responsibility for the welfare of livestock on farm, at market, at slaughter, for the welfare of all animals during transport and for domestic, wild and captive animals covered by the Zoo Licensing Act 1981 and the Dangerous Dogs Acts of 1989 and 1991.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* United Kingdom legislation, *(b)* EU legislation and *(c)* international treaties, conventions or other obligations concerning animal welfare for which his Department has responsibility. [34285]

Mr. Evans *[holding answer 25 June 1996]:* The information requested is as follows:

DOMESTIC LEGISLATION

Welfare of animals on farm

Docking and Nicking of Horses Act 1949 (Ch 70);

The Protection of Animals (Anaesthetics) Act 1954 and 1964 (Ch 46 and Ch 39);

Veterinary Surgeons (Exemptions) Order 1962 (SI 1962 No. 2557);

Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (1966 Ch 36);

Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 (1968 Ch 34);

Veterinary Surgeons (Exemptions) Order 1973 (SI 1973 No. 308);

The Docking of Pigs (Use of Anaesthetics) Order 1974 (SI 1974 No. 798);

The Welfare of Livestock Deer Order 1980 (SI 1980 No. 593);

The Removal of Antlers in Velvet (Anaesthetics) Order 1980 (SI 1980 No. 685);

The Welfare of Livestock (Prohibited Operations) Regulations 1982 (SI 1982 No. 1884);

The Protection of Animals (Anaesthetics) (Amendment) Order 1982 (1982 No. 1626);

Veterinary Surgeons (Exemptions) (Amendment) Order 1982 (SI 1982 No. 1627);

The Welfare of Livestock (Prohibited Operations) (Amendment) Regulations 1987 (SI 1987 No. 114);

Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (Schedule 3 Amendment) Order 1988 (SI 1988 No. 526);

Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (Schedule 3 Amendment) Order 1991 (SI 1991 No. 1412);

The Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994 (SI 1994 No. 2126).

WELFARE OF ANIMALS AT MARKET

The Welfare of Animals at Market Order 1990 (SI 1990 No. 2628);

The Welfare of Animals at Market (Amendment) Order 1993 (SI 1993 No. 3085);

The Welfare of Horses at Markets (and Other Places of Sale) Order 1990 (SI 1990 No. 2627).

THE WELFARE OF ANIMALS DURING TRANSPORT

The Transit of Animals Order 1927 (SI 1927 No. 289);

The Transit of Animals (Amendment) Order 1927 (SI 1927 No. 399);

The Animals (Sea Transport) Order 1930 (SI 1930 No. 923);

The Transit of Animals (Amendment) Order 1931 No. 750);

The Transit of Animals (Sea Transport) (Amendment) Order 1939 (SI 1939 No. 5842);

The Horses (Sea Transport) Order 1952 (SI 1952 No. 1291);

The Horses (Sea Transport) (Amendment) Order 1958 (SI 1958 No. 1272);

The Export of Horses (Veterinary Examinations) Order 1966 (SI 1966 No. 507);

The Export of Horses and (Excepted Cases) Order 1969 (SI 1969 No. 1784);

The Transit of Animals (General) Order 1973 (SI 1973 No. 1377);

The Transit of Animals (Road and Rail) Order 1975 (SI 1975 No. 1024);

The Export of Horses and Ponies (Increase in Minimum Values) Order 1978 (SI 1978 No. 1748);

The Transit of Animals (Road and Rail) (Amendment) Order 1979 (SI 1979 No. 1013);

The Export of Animals (Protection) Order 1981 (SI 1981 No. 1051);

The Transit of Animals (Amendment) Order 1988 (SI 1988 No. 815);

The Welfare of Poultry (Transport) Order 1988 (SI 1988 No. 851);

The Welfare of Poultry (Transport) (Amendment) Order 1989 (SI 1989 No. 52);

The Welfare of Animals During Transport Order (SI 1994 No. 3249);

The Welfare of Animals During Transport (Amendment) Order 1995 (SI 1995 No. 131).

Welfare of animals at slaughter

The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 (SI 1995 No. 731).

Other Legislation which has Welfare Implications

The Animals (Miscellaneous Provisions) Order 1927 (SI 1927 No. 290);

The Animals (Miscellaneous Provisions) Order 1938 (SI No. 5694);

Animal Health Act 1981 (Ch 22);

Animal Health Act 1981 (Amendment) Regulations 1992 (SI 1992 No. 3293);

Dangerous Dogs Acts 1989 and 1991;

Protection of Badgers Act 1992;

Zoo Licensing Act 1981.

EC Legislation

EC Directive 88/166 Laying Down Minimum Standards for the Protection of Laying Hens Kept in Battery Cages;

EC Directive 91/628 on the Protection of Animals During Transport;

EC Directive 91/629 Laying Down Minimum Standards for the Protection of Calves;

EC Directive 91/630 Laying Down Minimum Standards for the Protection of Pigs;

EC Direction 93/119 on the Protection of Animals at the Time of Slaughter or Killing;

EC Directive 95/29 Amending EC Directive 91/628 on the Protection of Animals During Transport.

EUROPEAN CONVENTIONS

European Convention for the Protection of Animals Kept for Farming Purposes;

European Convention for the Protection of Animals During International Transport;

European Convention for the Protection of Animals for Slaughter.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by group, division or other work unit the number of grades of staff working within his Department on animal welfare issues. [34286]

Mr. Evans *[holding answer 25 June 1996]:* Animal welfare matters are part of the duties of a grade 7, a higher executive officer, an executive officer and an administrative officer in the Agriculture Department of the Welsh Office and of an HEO and an EO in the local government division. Senior officers and lawyers deal with animal welfare as necessary.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amount of Government money has gone to the assisted places scheme since its inception. [38227]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Total Government expenditure on the assisted places scheme in Wales, since inception in 1981, amounts to some £23.7 million. This has enabled almost 1,900 students from lower income households to have access to good educational opportunities in the independent sector.

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many public engagements he has carried out since his appointment. [38830]

Mr. Hague: Since taking office I have undertaken at least 220 public engagements.

Village Shops

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the consultation exercise undertaken on his proposals for rate relief for village shops. [39335]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Following the commitment given by my right hon. Friend in January this year, 325 copies of the consultation paper were issued to local authorities and to a wide range of organisations and many individuals who expressed an interest: 93 responses were received. Of these, 54 comment on the definition of a rural area for the purposes of the scheme and 18 suggest additional communities which should be included. We have carefully considered these responses and decided to include an additional 48 communities. The list will now comprise of all those communities which meet the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development definition of rurality, based on low population density, and all those communities which have a population in total of 3,000 or less and which border one or more communities which meet the OECD definition. This will bring in communities such as Llanrug in Gwynedd and Faenor in Ceredigion.

A list of respondents to the consultation paper has been placed in the Library of the House, with the name of a person in the Welsh Office from whom copies of individual responses can be obtained. A list of communities to be covered by the rate of relief scheme, has also been placed in the Library of the House.

Decisions on other aspects of the scheme will be announced in due course.

Purchase Grant Scheme

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the consultation exercise undertaken on his proposals for exempting rural areas in Wales from the purchase grant scheme for housing association tenants. [39635]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Following the commitment given in January this year by my right hon. Friend, around 200 copies of the consultation paper were issued to local authorities, housing associations and other interested organisations: 12 responses were received. I have carefully considered these. I am confirming the proposals for the exemption which recognises the scattered population pattern which characterises much of rural Wales and provide protection to those sensitive areas which need it most. I am not making any changes to the list of exempted areas upon which we consulted.

The deadline for responses to the final consultation paper giving detailed proposals for England is 29 July. My right. hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be announcing the outcome in due course.

A list of respondents to the consultation paper has been placed in the Library of the House, and this contains a contact point in the Welsh Office for copies of individual responses.

List of Respondents to the Consultation Paper "Purchase Grant Scheme for Housing Association Tenants in Wales—Rural Exemption Proposals"

The Countryside Council for Wales;

The Country Landowners Association;

Glamorgan and Gwent Housing Association;

Wrexham County Borough Council;

Conwy County Borough Council;

Monmouthshire County Council;

City and County of Swansea;

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council;

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council;

Vale of Glamorgan Council;

Newport County Borough Council;

The Chartered Institute of Housing.

Copies of individual responses can be obtained from Mrs. K. M. Worsey on 01222 823903.

Extra-contractual Referrals

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of how the proposed changes in the extra-contractual referral system reducing the prior notification and approval system will affect the access to treatment of patients of *(a)* fundholding and *(b)* non-fundholding general practitioners; and if he will make a statement. [39691]

Mr. Hague: Proposed changes in the extra-contractual referral system will not reduce the access to treatment of patients of either fundholding or non-fundholding general practitioners.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those making representations concerning the contents of the departmental letters of 12 and 20 June concerning extra-contractual referral administration. [39715]

Mr. Hague: In response to departmental letters of 12 and 20 June about extra-contractual referrals, commetns were received from the following:

Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust

Derwen NHS Trust

Rhondda NHS Trust

Carmarthen & District NHS Trust

Nevill Hall & District NHS Trust

Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS Trust

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what estimate he has made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* cost of treatments no longer requiring to be notified to purchasers in advance of treatment by virtue of the 2 July letter of guidance to health authorities, trusts and fundholders (i) between 1 August 1996 and 31 March 1997 and *(b)* in a typical year; and what is the estimated net annual administrative cost saving; [39739]

(2) what assessment he has made of the level of extra-contractual referral activity in Wales in the financial years 1994–95 and 1995–96; what proportion of the total cost of extra-contractual referral was for *(a)* tertiary referral and *(b)* emergency reasons; what the total cost was of administering the extra-contractual referral system for the latest available financial year; and if he will make a statement. [39710]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the effect of the abolition of the requirement for notification of extra-contractual referrals from 1 August on the explicit exclusions from current contracts with trusts for certain interventions *(a)* on grounds of clinical ineffectiveness and *(b)* on all other grounds. [39743]

Mr. Hague: It is not anticipated that the abolition of the requirement for notification of ECRs from 1 August will have any effect on explicit exclusions from current contracts either on grounds of clinical ineffectiveness or on any other grounds.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the current system for resolving disputed extra-contractual referral cases; and what proposals he has to revise the disputes procedure in the light of the new guidance letter of 2 July. [39705]

Mr. Hague: Disputed extra-contractual referral cases are referred to the Welsh Office for arbitration. Details were set out in guidance issued on 31 March 1995. It is not anticipated that these arrangements will be changed.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provision he is making to consult non-fundholding GPs on the proposed changes in the notification procedure on extra-contractual referrals which terminate the requirement for trusts to seek prior approval from health authorities before providing elective treatment to patients outside existing contracts. [39716]

Mr. Hague: Health authorities will be expected to work closely with all GPs in their area to agree suitable arrangements for dealing with extra-contractual referrals for elective treatments following the proposed abolition of the requirement for trusts to seek prior approval.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what arrangements he is making to publicise the changes in the extra-contractual referral system due on 1 August; [39712]

(2) what provision he made for non-fundholding GPs to be notified of the proposed changes in the extra-contractual referral system as regards *(a)* the termination of the requirement to notify purchasers of emergency or tertiary extra-contractual referrals and *(b)* the exceptions to the changes. [39714]

Mr. Hague: Health authorities, NHS trusts and GP fundholders received formal notification of changes in the extra-contractual referral system in departmental guidance issued on 2 July. In the normal way, health authorities will be expected to ensure that the information is brought to the attention of all general practitioners in their area.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the effect of the abolition of requirement for notification of extra-contractual referrals from 1 August on the practice of general practitioner fundholder contracts with trusts requiring prior authorisation in advance of elective tertiary referrals; and if he will make a statement. [39744]

Mr. Hague: The abolition of the requirement for prior notification of elective tertiary referrals will apply equally to general practitioner fundholder contracts and those of health authorities.

Emergency Hospital Beds

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from the Trust Executive Advisory Group in relation to the demand for medical emergency beds. [39674]

Mr. Hague: The chairman of the Trust Executive Advisory Group has written to my Department expressing a number of concerns about the allowance made for medical emergency care in health authority contracts for the present financial year.

A joint action plan was agreed earlier this year between trusts and health authorities to minimise the risk of hospitals closing to emergency patients next winter. Health authorities have recently confirmed their commitment to this action plan and that this area of care is their top priority and the first call on the additional £55 million made available to them for 1996–97.

Health authorities will shortly be sending my Department details of the allowance made for emergency admissions in their contracts for the present financial year. When this information is available, it will be possible to make an informed judgment of whether the concerns of trust chief executives are well based. If they are, health authorities will be asked to review their existing contracts and to adjust them accordingly.

St. David's Hospital

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairmen of the Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS trust and the Bro Taf health authority concerning the finalising of proposals for the replacement neighbourhood hospital on the St. David's hospital site. [39711]

Mr. Hague: None. My officials are in close touch with officers from both organistions who are responsible for preparing and agreeing the business case.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place a copy in the Library of the fifth version of the Welsh ambulance policy and advisory group's proposals for Welsh ambulance trusts mergers; when it was received in his Department; and if he will make a statement. [39850]

Mr. Hague: I have not received any formal proposals. My Department would consult publicly on any formal application that was submitted and a copy would be placed in the Library of the House.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the introduction of a deficiency payments system for the under-30-month clean beef trade pending the return of normal market conditions; and if he will make a statement. [39713]

Mr. Hague: I have received representations from the Farmers Union of Wales asking for a deficiency payment system for the under-30-month clean beef trade.

Resurgam Submarine Vessel

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will take steps to establish who *(a)* now owns the submarine vessel Resurgam and *(b)* has legal right of access to the vessel; and if he will make a statement; [39648]

(2) if he will ensure that appropriate arrangements are made to salvage the submarine vessel Resurgam and to place it on public display in a suitable place; [39647]

(3) what steps he is taking to protect against vandalism the British-powered submarine vessel Resurgam sunk off the north Wales coast in 1880 and found in October 1995. [39649]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Child Abuse

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his oral statement of 17 June, *Official Report*, columns 521–24, how long the tribunal of inquiry into north Wales child abuse is likely to sit. [40096]

Mr. Hague: I have discussed the question of a target date with Sir Ronald Waterhouse and have agreed with him that the aim should be for the tribunal to complete the taking of written and oral evidence by the end of 1997.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many parliamentary questions to his Department have been referred for answer to non-departmental public bodies for which he has responsibility, in each of the last six parliamentary sessions, and so far in the 1995–96 Session; and if he will make a statement. [38698]

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The information requested is available only for the 1994–95 and current parliamentary Sessions.

	Parliamentary session	
	1994–95	*1995–96*
Number of Parliamentary Questions referred to NDPBs	38	37

I have the discretion to decide whether, in answering a parliamentary question, I should ask the chief executive of the relevant NDPB to write direct to the hon. Member as an operational matter. Copies of all letters are placed in the Library of the House.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients receiving *(a)* hip replacement, *(b)* cataract extraction, *(c)* kidney transplant and *(d)* hernia operations carried out by the NHS in Wales had to wait for (i) more than six months, (ii) more than nine months, (iii) more than 12 months, (iv) more than 15 months and (v) more than 18 months in the most recent year for which figures are available. [38850]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The available information is given in the following table. Not all hospitals provide the relevant data and therefore percentages are based only on cases where full data are available. There is no information on kidney transplant patients for 1995–96 but in the preceding year all such patients had their operations within six months.

Percentage of cases[1] admitted in 1995–96 who waited

Operation	*More than 6 months*	*More than 9 months*	*More than 12 months*	*More than 15 months*	*More than 18 months*
Hip replacements	27.9	16.0	8.0	3.3	0.8
Cataract extraction	30.2	19.1	10.3	3.8	1.5
Hernia operations	16.4	8.3	3.7	1.4	0.8

[1] Based on data available for 1,529 hip replacements, 8,551 cataract extractions and 3,502 hernia operations.

NHS Staff

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by family health services authority the number of *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* midwives, *(d)* health visitors, *(e)* administration and clerical staff and *(f)* managers in (i) 1990, (ii) 1992, (iii) 1994 and (iv) 1995. [39201]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The available information is given in the following table. It relates to general medical practitioners, the staff they employed and the staff directly employed by the former family health services authorities but does not include staff employed by NHS trusts or the former health authorities.

Staff in post at 1 October (whole-time equivalent numbers except for doctors)

	1990	*1992*	*1994*	*1995*
Clwyd				
Doctors[1]	224	226	228	230
Practice nurses	53	37	70	n/a
GP receptionist/secretarial[2]	262	281	298	n/a
Practice management staff	39	54	56	n/a
FHSA managers	n/a	15	15	16
FHSA administrative and clerical staff[3]	n/a	59	59	57
Dyfed				
Doctors[1]	212	221	225	227
Practice nurses	69	82	87	n/a
GP receptionist/secretarial[2]	217	292	291	n/a
Practice management staff	34	45	55	n/a
FHSA managers	n/a	12	14	11
FHSA administrative and clerical staff[3]	n/a	52	60	61
Gwent				
Doctors[1]	243	245	249	252
Practice nurses	77	87	85	n/a
GP receptionist/secretarial[2]	292	268	271	n/a
Practice management staff	44	49	49	n/a
FHSA managers	n/a	7	8	8
FHSA administrative and clerical staff[3]	n/a	60	68	64
Gwynedd				
Doctors[1]	152	157	163	167
Practice nurses	49	55	54	n/a
GP receptionist/secretarial[2]	166	177	188	n/a
Practice management staff	31	32	35	n/a
FHSA managers	n/a	14	16	15
FHSA administrative and clerical staff[3]	n/a	46	49	47

Staff in post at 1 October (whole-time equivalent numbers except for doctors)

	1990	*1992*	*1994*	*1995*
Mid Glamorgan				
Doctors[1]	296	306	304	296
Practice nurses	76	99	144	n/a
GP receptionist/secretarial[2]	358	364	544	n/a
Practice management staff	26	41	84	n/a
FHSA managers	n/a	13	15	17
FHSA administrative and clerical staff[3]	n/a	69	74	68
Powys				
Doctors[1]	79	78	85	87
Practice nurses	22	21	22	n/a
GP receptionist/secretarial[2]	115	101	112	n/a
Practice management staff	17	18	23	n/a
FHSA managers	n/a	8	10	10
FHSA administrative and clerical staff[3]	n/a	26	30	27
South Glamorgan				
Doctors[1]	234	239	245	250
Practice nurses	56	63	69	n/a
GP receptionist/secretarial[2]	272	298	324	n/a
Practice management staff	48	56	57	n/a
FHSA managers	n/a	7	10	10
FHSA administrative and clerical staff[3]	n/a	60	65	66
West Glamorgan				
Doctors[1]	195	204	211	210
Practice nurses	56	75	80	n/a
GP receptionist/secretarial[2]	262	274	317	n/a
Practice management staff	36	56	44	n/a
FHSA managers	n/a	6	9	9
FHSA administrative and clerical staff[3]	n/a	48	47	48

[1] Numbers of unrestricted principals.

[2] Includes receptionists, secretarial/clerical staff and computer operators but excludes practice managers.

[3] Includes managers.

n/a = Reliable information is not yet available.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the overall number of *(a)* administrative staff, *(b)* managerial staff, *(c)* nurses, *(d)* junior doctors and *(e)* other medical staff employed in each region for each of the last four years. [39202]

Mr. Jones: The available information is given in the following table. The figures relate to staff directly employed by health authorities, NHS trusts, Welsh Health Common Services Authority and family health services authorities but excludes GPs and the staff they employ.

Staff in post at 30 September (whole-time equivalent numbers)

	1992	1993	1994	1995
Administrative and clerical staff[1]	9,498	10,082	9,905	9,875
Managers	893	1,159	1,292	1,350
Nursing and midwifery staff[2]	25,555	25,422	25,220	24,728
Junior doctors[3]	1,472	1,561	1,604	1,651
Other medical staff[4]	1,333	1,371	1,438	1,493

[1] Including managers, some of whom have been reclassified from other staff groups in recent years.
[2] Excluding pre-registration learner nurses.
[3] House officers, senior house officers, registrars and senior registrars.
[4] Other grades in the hospital service and medical staff in the community service.

Pupil Numbers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary pupils in each education authority in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [39192]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is as follows:

Number of full time equivalent pupils as at January 1995 in local education authority maintained schools

	Primary	Secondary
Blaenau Gwent	7,416	3,949
Bridgend	12,729	9,129
Caerphilly	17,807	11,981
Cardiff	29,092	19,450
Carmarthenshire	15,453	11,845
Ceredigion	5,661	4,949
Conwy	8,568	3,098
Denbighshire	8,284	6,580
Flintshire	13,875	10,057
Gwynedd	9,904	7,267
Isle of Anglesey	5,949	4,938
Merthyr Tydfil	6,571	4,551
Monmouthshire	6,646	5,224
Neath Port Talbot	13,508	9,120
Newport	14,302	9,489
Pembrokeshire	10,702	8,067
Powys	11,060	8,071
Rhondda Cynon Taff	25,404	17,627
Swansea	21,774	14,230
Torfaen	9,370	6,492
The Vale of Glamorgan	11,796	5,556
Wrexham	11,757	6,796
Wales	277,628	188,466

Administration Costs

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total cost of administration for his Department, in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [39190]

Mr. Hague: This information is contained in my Department's annual report, which was published in March 1996, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Beaches

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what step the Welsh Office has taken to improve the standards of Welsh beaches; how much funding has been given to projects designed to improve the quality of Welsh beaches; and if he will make a statement. [39090]

Mr. Hague: Since privatisation of the water industry in 1989, water undertakers have been engaged in a programme of improvements to coastal discharges designed to achieve compliance with the mandatory standards of the EC bathing water directive (76/160/EEC) at all identified bathing waters. Dwr Cymru Welsh Water's programme of improvements approved in 1989 and costing over £200 million should be completed in 1997.

In the five years to the year 2000 the company will invest a total of some £600 million on improvements to discharges affecting coastal waters. Together with the chairmen of the Wales tourist board and Dwr Cymru Welsh Water, I launched the green sea initiative on 1 May. The objective of the collaborative environmental initiative, which is unique to Wales, is to achieve the more stringent guideline standards under the bathing water directive around the coast of Wales and to aim for 50 blue flag beaches by the year 2000.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many beaches in Wales failed to meet EU standards in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [39089]

Mr. Hague: The numbers of bathing waters in Wales identified under EC directive 76/160/EEC which passed and failed to meet the directive's mandatory bacteriological standards since 1990 are as follows:

Year	Number passing EC mandatory standards	Number failing to meet EC mandatory standards
1990	35	15
1991	45	5
1992	39	11
1993	42	8
1994	38	12
1995	49	6

Secretary of State (Work in Wales)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the percentage of his working time which he spends in Wales. [39078]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on Tuesday 4 June, column *369*.

School Leavers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what percentage of 16-year-olds left school in Wales with no formal qualifications, for each education authority, in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [39080]

Mr. Hague: The readily available information for the years specified relates to those pupils, aged 16 and over, who left school without any GCSE, A or AS-level qualifications. Some of these pupils will have achieved other qualifications, such as the certificate of education. The information is contained in the following table.

Number and percentage of pupils leaving school, aged 16 and over, without any GCSE, A or AS level qualifications

Maintained schools in:	*1989–90*[1]		*1990–91*[1]		*1991–92*[2]		*1992–93*[2]		*1993–94*[2]	
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Clwyd	355	7	335	8	450	10	380	9	310	7
Dyfed	565	14	570	15	335	9	405	10	350	9
Gwent	815	15	900	18	645	13	635	14	620	13
Gwynedd	325	11	280	10	235	9	205	7	145	6
Mid Glamorgan	1,570	24	1,280	20	1,100	19	915	16	950	17
Powys	105	7	45	3	75	6	65	5	70	6
South Glamorgan	680	15	560	13	645	14	575	14	555	13
West Glamorgan	650	15	385	9	500	12	470	12	375	9
Wales (including Independent Schools)	5,080	14	4,400	13	4,030	12	3,695	12	3,395	11

[1] From School Examinations Survey, of a sample of school leavers.
[2] From Intended Destinations of Pupils (RD1) Survey.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the Welsh schools which have sold playing fields to private companies; and if he will make a statement. [39082]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not available centrally.

School Teachers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of *(a)* primary school and *(b)* secondary school teachers employed in each education authority in Wales in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [39084]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is as follows.

Number of full time equivalent qualified teachers in LEA maintained primary schools[1]

School year	*1979–80*	*1980–81*	*1981–82*	*1982–83*	*1983–84*	*1984–85*	*1985–86*	*1986–87*
Clwyd	1,799	1,745	1,636	1,579	1,540	1,521	1,494	1,466
Dyfed	1,765	1,671	1,592	1,536	1,522	1,465	1,402	1,431
Gwent	2,001	1,907	1,830	1,782	1,732	1,729	1,739	1,769
Gwynedd	1,166	1,149	1,127	1,058	1,033	995	971	950
Mid Glamorgan	2,577	2,467	2,371	2,264	2,332	2,252	2,241	2,200
Powys	599	578	541	544	546	515	603	505
South Glamorgan	1,590	1,559	1,492	1,430	1,423	1,425	1,434	1,450
West Glamorgan	1,753	1,710	1,616	1,546	1,522	1,497	1,501	1,542
Wales	13,250	12,786	12,205	11,739	11,651	11,399	11,285	11,313

School year	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Clwyd	1,488	1,482	1,510	1,550	1,563	1,610	1,569	1,547
Dyfed	1,448	1,554	1,597	1,599	1,614	1,625	1,636	1,599
Gwent	1,745	1,756	1,798	1,801	1,801	1,843	1,855	1,870
Gwynedd	958	951	945	926	907	926	905	941
Mid Glamorgan	2,279	2,308	2,347	2,311	2,355	2,386	2,416	2,409
Powys	514	518	519	508	510	513	522	531
South Glamorgan	1,498	1,536	1,607	1,691	1,716	1,737	1,747	1,798
West Glamorgan	1,552	1,566	1,609	1,615	1,617	1,646	1,673	1,668
Wales	11,482	11,671	11,932	12,001	12,083	12,286	12,323	12,363

[1] At January each year. Excluding Grant Maintained schools.

The Maximum weekly hours worked figure used to calculate the full time equivalent teacher numbers was changed in 1988–89 from 25 to 32.5, with the effect of reducing the overall number of full time equivalent teachers.

Number of full time equivalent qualified teachers in LEA maintained secondary schools[1]

School year	*1979–80*	*1980–81*	*1981–82*	*1982–83*	*1983–84*	*1984–85*	*1985–86*	*1986–87*
Clwyd	1,945	1,956	1,930	1,973	1,973	1,933	1,871	1,821
Dyfed	1,636	1,646	1,658	1,660	1,659	1,636	1,601	1,573
Gwent	2,453	2,375	2,356	2,343	2,330	2,245	2,186	2,115
Gwynedd	1,178	1,192	1,212	1,244	1,269	1,261	1,252	1,200
Mid Glamorgan	2,856	2,835	2,689	2,700	2,784	2,721	2,624	2,550
Powys	574	575	575	570	579	591	585	577
South Glamorgan	1,985	1,957	1,929	1,938	1,895	1,843	1,801	1,723
West Glamorgan	1,912	1,904	1,876	1,845	1,806	1,739	1,684	1,640
Wales	14,539	14,440	14,225	14,273	14,295	13,970	13,604	13,199

School year	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Clwyd	1,804	1,718	1,679	1,676	1,711	1,680	1,431	1,376
Dyfed	1,539	1,495	1,469	1,472	1,480	1,517	1,535	1,528
Gwent	2,035	1,966	1,889	1,857	1,817	1,825	1,761	1,754
Gwynedd	1,170	1,142	1,110	1,082	1,074	1,074	1,035	1,019
Mid Glamorgan	2,459	2,380	2,297	2,271	2,328	2,378	2,452	2,500
Powys	567	555	544	529	537	535	544	553
South Glamorgan	1,665	1,606	1,651	1,641	1,656	1,675	1,504	1,502
West Glamorgan	1,618	1,592	1,531	1,498	1,421	1,427	1,451	1,462
Wales	12,857	12,454	12,170	12,026	12,024	12,111	11,713	11,694

[1] At January each year. Excluding Grant Maintained schools.
The Maximum weekly hours worked figure used to calculate the full time equivalent teacher numbers was changed in 1988–89 from 25 to 32.5, with the effect of reducing the overall number of full time equivalent teachers.

EU Funding

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the capital projects which have been funded by EU money in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [39086]

Mr. Hague: This information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much *(a)* objective 2 and *(b)* objective 5b funding Wales received from the EU in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [39085]

Mr. Hague: The information is as follows:

£ million

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Objective 2[1]	45.2	24.2	4.1
Objective 5(a)[2]	8.5	7.3	8.5
EAGGF guidance fund			
Objective 5(b)[1]	0.0	21.2	4.6

[1] Does not include ESF receipts which are the responsibility of DFEE.
[2] Does not include receipts that come to Wales via the Intervention Board Executive Agency (IBEA).

Overall receipts of £241.3 million are anticipated for the programmes under objectives 2 and 5b which cover the years 1994–96 and 1994–99 respectively. The rules governing the drawdown of receipts from the European Commission produce an uneven distribution across financial years. The first tranches were received during 1994–95, on approval of the programmes. Subsequent tranches can be drawn down only when certified eligible expenditure, declared in claims submitted by recipients of grant, reaches specific trigger levels. Payments under these programmes continue into the subsequent two financial years following the closure of the programme.

Housing Waiting Lists

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of people currently on housing waiting lists in each local authority in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [39088]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not held centrally.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of hospital beds available for use in each Welsh health authority in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [39092]

Mr. Hague: The information is given in the following table. Data for NHS trusts are included within the health authority area in which the trust was situated. The changes in bed numbers reflect shorter hospital stays and more patients requiring long-term care being treated in the community. Over the same period of time the number of in-patients and day cases admitted to hospitals in Wales has almost doubled.

Average daily available beds

Health Authority area

	Clwyd	*East Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Pembrokeshire*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*
1979	3,052	2,098	3,883	1,570	4,943	466	1,266	3,584	2,594
1980	3,015	2,064	3,923	1,568	4,864	467	1,180	3,515	2,607

Average daily available beds

Health Authority area

	Clwyd	East Dyfed	Gwent	Gwynedd	Mid Glamorgan	Pembrokeshire	Powys	South Glamorgan	West Glamorgan
1981	2,991	2,015	3,836	1,545	4,793	461	1,161	3,521	2,618
1982	2,926	1,800	3,714	1,529	4,726	473	1,144	3,523	2,606
1983–84	2,946	1,845	3,697	1,512	4,725	476	1,072	3,555	2,584
1984–85	2,869	1,796	3,664	1,564	4,749	465	1,086	3,553	2,548
1985–86	2,792	1,764	3,595	1,619	4,585	472	1,049	3,536	2,587
1986–87	2,759	1,737	3,500	1,628	4,476	472	1,000	3,434	2,559
1987–88	2,669	1,659	3,477	1,599	4,364	453	998	3,390	2,494
1988–89	2,563	1,623	3,344	1,594	4,232	470	952	3,357	2,369
1989–90	2,443	1,579	3,208	1,587	4,047	469	908	3,272	2,343
1990–91	2,362	1,562	3,120	1,552	3,959	460	896	3,203	2,300
1991–92	2,304	1,507	2,889	1,426	3,826	443	848	3,110	2,288
1992–93	2,252	1,491	2,778	1,434	3,646	437	854	2,940	2,244
1993–94	2,168	1,454	2,630	1,420	3,499	438	815	2,834	2,217
1994–95	2,083	1,369	2,421	1,431	3,302	424	773	2,808	2,224

NHS Managers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of *(a)* managers and *(b)* senior managers employed by each (i) Welsh health authority and (ii) Welsh health trust, and in total, in each applicable year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [39075]

Mr. Hague: Information on staff classified as managers as a separate group is available from 1987 but data for managers and senior managers cannot be split reliably. The figures are given in the following table but data are not comparable from year to year. Later years' figures include staff who have been reclassified as managers following the extension of senior managers terms and conditions of service to allow inclusion of other staff. Information on the number of administrative and clerical staff, including managers, in Wales since 1979 is also shown in a following table.

Managers in post (whole-time equivalent numbers) at 30 September

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Health authorities including staff in directly managed units and staff directly employed by FHSAs									
Clwyd	6	10	27	49	99	136	40	35	37
Dyfed	4	7	22	50	83	70	48	39	36
Gwent	3	6	7	54	77	90	48	30	30
Gwynedd	5	8	8	21	32	66	74	28	27
Mid Glamorgan	6	10	12	32	90	103	119	81	77
Powys	2	3	8	26	39	39	15	16	16
South Glamorgan	4	8	61	92	142	194	159	178	43
West Glamorgan	5	7	29	67	80	89	78	59	54
WHCSA[1]	1	5	13	46	71	86	128	153	141
NHS Trusts									
Bridgend and District	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	29	35	36
Cardiff Community Healthcare	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	45
Carmarthen and District	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	21	22	24
Ceredigion and Mid Wales	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	16	20	21
Clwydian Community Care	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	53	54	52
Derwen	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	19	20
East Glamorgan	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	20	23
Glan Clwyd Hospital	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	27	29	28
Glan Hafren	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	40	53	52
Gwent Community	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	49	58	69
Gwynedd Community Health	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	23	25
Gwynedd Hospitals	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	14	9
Llandough	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	72	72	78
Lanelli/Dinefwr	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	17	19	22
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	32	36
Morriston	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	22	38
Nevill Hall and District	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	18	20
North Wales Ambulance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6	11
Pembrokeshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	21	21	17	17
Powys Health Care	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	37	37	31
Rhondda Health Care	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	20	29
South and East Wales Ambulance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	27	25	25

Managers in post (whole-time equivalent numbers) at 30 September

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Swansea	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	15	17	17
University Hospital of Wales Healthcare	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	108
University Dental Hospital	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	4
Velindre	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	11	12
West Wales Ambulance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6
Wrexham Maelor Hospital	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	27	30	32
Wales	36	64	187	436	711	893	1,159	1,292	1,350

[1] Welsh Health Common Services Authority including Health Promotion Wales.
n/a = not applicable.

Administrative and clerical staff (including managers) in post (whole-time equivalent numbers) at 30 September

	Number
1979	6,229
1980	6,287
1981	6,398
1982	6,446
1983	6,530
1984	6,675
1985	6,837
1986	6,969
1987	7,136
1988	7,326
1989	7,667
1990	8,185
1991	8,865
1992	9,498
1993	10,082
1994	9,905
1995	9,875

Nursery Education

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the number of *(a)* three-year-old and *(b)* four-year-old children currently receiving nursery education in Wales; what is his estimate of the change in the number of three and four-year-olds who would receive nursery education under the nursery voucher scheme; and what evidence this estimate is based on. [39096]

Mr. Hague: At January 1995, an estimated 19,625 three-year-olds and 35,031 four-year-olds were in maintained and independent schools[1]. The voucher scheme will enable the parents of all four-year-olds to seek nursery education for their children for a full three terms in the setting of their choice, which is not always available under current arrangements. Take-up will depend on parental choice and the availability of places. The voucher scheme need not affect provision for three-year-olds, which remains at the discretion of local education authorities.

[1]Statistics of Education and Training in Wales: Schools No. 4 1996; Table 2.2.

Pupil Exclusions

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many 11 to 16-year-old pupils are *(a)* permanently excluded from (i) local education authority secondary schools and (ii) grant-maintained secondary schools, for the most recent year for which figures are available and *(b)* have been admitted following permanent exclusion from another school to (1) local education authority secondary schools and (2) grant-maintained secondary schools; and if he will make a statement. [39079]

Mr. Hague: The information available is in respect of pupils of all ages. In the 1994–95 academic year (i) 367 pupils were permanently excluded from local education authority secondary schools and (ii) 31 pupils were permanently excluded from grant-maintained secondary schools. Information on the numbers admitted to schools following permanent exclusion from another school is not currently available centrally.

Empty Council Properties

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many empty local authority properties there are in each local authority in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [39118]

Mr. Hague: The information the hon. and learned Member has requested is not yet available by unitary authority as the figures are gathered on an annual basis. However, the following table shows the numbers of vacant properties in the areas of the old district councils.

Vacant local authority dwellings[1]

	Number of vacant dwellings
Aberconwy	16
Alyn and Deeside*	88
Arfon	84
Blaenau Gwent	140
Brecknock	7
Cardiff	284
Carmarthen	8
Ceredigion	23
Colwyn	40
Cynon Valley	75
Delyn*	33
Dinefwr	33
Dwyfor	23
Glyndwr	26
Islwyn	61
Llanelli	160
Lliw Valley	60
Meirionnydd*	22
Merthyr Tydfil	203

Vacant local authority dwellings[1]

	Number of vacant dwellings
Monmouth	33
Montgomeryshire	20
Neath	118
Newport	140
Ogwr	325
Port Talbot	136
Preseli Pembrokeshire	63
Radnorshire	22
Rhondda	140
Rhuddlan	11
Rhymney Valley	99
South Pembrokeshire	15
Swansea	320
Taff-Ely	67
Torfaen	281
Vale of Glamorgan	97
Wrexham Maelor	177
Ynys Mon	71
Wales	3,521

[1] The data relate to the position on 1 April 1996 except when marked* where they relate to 1 April 1995.

Homelessness

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were statutorily recognised as homeless in each Welsh local authority in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [39191]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is in the following table:

Number of people statutorily recognised as homeless

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Aberconwy	137	104	151	148	187	195
Alyn and Deeside	474	499	633	471	476	536
Arfon	77	93	103	87	56	85
Blaenau Gwent	841	761	417	668	591	584
Brecknock	269	318	318	281	359	226
Cardiff	2,483	4,052	4,555	5,649	4,638	2,052
Carmarthen	189	227	363	301	282	259
Ceredigion	331	373	340	359	269	288
Colwyn	103	178	176	274	241	210
Cynon Valley	623	1,017	543	434	241	243
Delyn	825	683	503	384	414	281
Dinefwr	181	410	542	626	519	375
Dwyfor	162	127	104	97	65	87
Glyndwr	46	87	70	86	58	91
Islwyn	370	399	414	442	807	332
Llanelli	297	383	284	259	241	156
Lliw Valley	379	369	192	169	190	111
Meirionnydd	250	257	174	141	145	174
Merthyr Tydfil	496	365	238	355	296	385
Monmouth	281	388	286	338	278	247
Montgomeryshire	188	259	296	273	251	316
Neath	610	656	757	652	526	514
Newport	2,696	2,936	2,283	1,819	1,540	1,414
Ogwr	1,332	1,809	2,095	2,520	2,260	2,693
Port Talbot	303	340	369	363	308	269
Preseli Pembrokeshire	209	255	359	311	269	312
Radnorshire	64	45	82	55	100	98
Rhondda	166	358	374	240	192	212
Rhuddlan	293	177	91	162	111	143
Rhymney Valley	439	395	335	424	340	333
South Pembrokeshire	248	205	171	214	192	231
Swansea	450	1,779	1,622	1,864	3,072	2,506
Taff-Ely	568	743	770	845	612	584
Torfaen	1,216	1,038	952	818	737	410
Vale of Glamorgan	1,160	1,184	1,139	458	391	553
Wrexham Maelor	863	730	864	613	692	660
Ynys Mon	97	111	204	294	176	197
Wales	19,716	24,110	23,169	23,494	22,122	18,362

Class Sizes

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the percentage of *(a)* primary school children and *(b)* secondary school children, who are taught in classes of 30 or more in Wales, and if he will make a statement. [39193]

Mr. Hague: Information about primary school class sizes is collected centrally only in respect of the number of classes, not the number of pupils in the classes. Twenty-two per cent. of ordinary classes in primary schools had more than 30 pupils at January 1995. The information requested in respect of secondary school class sizes is not collected centrally.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what research he has evaluated on the effect of class size on *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school children's education; and if he will make a statement; [39076]

(2) if he will make a statement on the average size of classes in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Wales. [39117]

Mr. Hague: Average class sizes in 1994–95—the latest year for which figures are available—were 20.2 in secondary schools and 25.9 in primary schools.

It is for individual schools to determine class sizes according to their own circumstances and priorities.

I have made no evaluations of research in this area. Good education depends on good planning and effective teaching.

In-patient Admissions

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of ordinary in-patient admissions by region in each of the last four years. [39203]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is given in the following table. Data for NHS trusts are included within the health authority area in which the trust was situated.

Number of in-patient cases[1]

Health authority area	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*[2]
Clwyd	73,209	72,527	73,906	69,876
East Dyfed	40,606	42,353	41,033	39,747
Gwent	74,455	75,450	74,423	73,381
Gwynedd	39,567	40,123	40,421	40,180
Mid Glamorgan	96,152	97,597	98,766	101,283
Pembrokeshire	17,613	17,131	17,437	17,714
Powys	9,180	8,962	9,736	9,718
South Glamorgan	83,940	84,105	84,268	86,732
West Glamorgan	69,625	69,907	73,427	75,177
Total	504,347	508,155	513,417	513,808

[1] Discharges and deaths.
[2] Provisional.

MRSA

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the hospitals in Wales that have recorded incidents of MRSA—methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus—since 1990; and how many patients suffered in each incident. [39020]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 22 January, *Official Report*, column *102*. Data available from the MRSA surveillance project under way in Wales need to be addressed with caution. Data from this project are shown in the following table:

Laboratory confirmed cases of MRSA in Wales

Laboratory	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Bangor Public Health Laboratory	92	132	113
Bridgend Princess of Wales	0	0	12
Bronglais Hospital	9	25	28
Caerphilly Hospital	18	29	55
Cardiff Public Health Laboratory	5	29	55
Cardiff Royal Infirmary	179	0	0
Carmarthen Public Health Laboratory	18	36	49
East Glamorgan Hospital	0	0	0
Llandough Hospital	104	19	204
Llanelli Prince Phillip	18	0	0
Merthyr Prince Charles	80	93	50
Nevill Hall	1	0	145
Newport Royal Gwent	2	2	53
Rhyl Public Health Laboratory	3	4	31
Swansea Morriston	9	0	0
Swansea Singleton	2	65	219
Withybush Hospital	1	0	13
Wrexham	0	8	149
Wales	541	442	1,176

Source:
CDSC Welsh Unit MRSA Surveillance Programme in Wales.
Notes:
Data on MRSA collected during the period 1994 to 22 July 1996.
Completeness of reporting by laboratory is variable.
Increased emphasis was placed on reporting in 1996 and additional features requested.
Data may include some GP referrals.
The numbers indicated are patients identified with MRSA. Only a proportion of these will have clinical illness, (estimated at 50 per cent.) due to MRSA infection. The remainder will be carriers of the organism.

Cottage Hospitals

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the cottage hospitals which have been closed in Wales since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [39091]

Mr. Hague: Hospitals which have been closed since 1979 and were not district general or psychiatric hospitals are given in the following list. The list excludes St. Lawrence hospital, Chepstow and Talgarn miners rehabilitation hospital which were not classed as cottage hospitals. During the same period six cottage hospitals have opened.

The NHS in Wales is treating more patients than ever. Since 1979 the number of in-patients and day cases admitted to hospitals has nearly doubled and the number of new out-patients seen has increased by about 50 per cent.

Adelina Patti
Allt-yr-yn
Blackmill
Bridgend and District
Caernarfon Cottage
Catherine Gladstone
Chatsworth House
Cefn Hirgoed
Cefn Mably
Children's ENT, Cardiff
Cilymaenllwyd
Colwyn Bat Maternity
Cwmdonkin
Druid
Energlyn
Fedw Hir
Galltysil

Glan Ely
Glyncornel
Gors Maternity
Groesynyd
LLangwyfan
Llwynderw
Madoc Memorial
Merthyr General
Mount Pleasant, West Glamorgan
Neale Kent
Neath Annexe
Pentwyn Cottage
Pontypool and District
Pontypridd Cottage
Port Talbot[1]
Prince Edward's War Memorial
Rhiwfelin
Snatchwood
St. David's, Brecon
St. David's Cardiff
St. David's, Gwynedd
Stanley Sailors
Tyntyla

[1] As no in-patients are treated the building is no longer classed as a hospital.

Crime Prevention

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the expenditure by his Department on crime prevention, in each of the last five years for which the figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [39077]

Mr. Hague: My Department has no formal policy responsibility for crime prevention, although some expenditure within Welsh Office programmes is for crime prevention activity.

Identifiable Welsh Office expenditure on crime prevention in each of the last three years is listed as follows:

1994–95: £1,083,000
1995–96: £1,729,000
1996–97: £1,832,000

Comparable figures are not available for previous years.

Other schemes funded by the Welsh Office also include elements of crime prevention, but it is impossible to quantify the amounts specific to it.

Welsh Language

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Welsh language schemes as set out in the Welsh Language Act 1994 have been *(a)* submitted to and *(b)* approved by the Welsh Office; and if he will make a statement. [39081]

Mr. Hague: This is an operational matter for the Welsh Language Board, established by the Welsh Language Act 1993, the responsibilities of which include the receipt and approval of schemes. I have asked the chief executive to write directly to the hon. Member and will place a copy of his letter in the Library of the House.

Education Authority Grants

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the Welsh Office grant for each education authority in Wales in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [39083]

Mr. Hague: Support for local government spending through revenue support grant and redistributed non-domestic rates is not hypothecated to specific services. Allocations of education related specific grants paid to local authorities are shown in the following table: Details of grant allocations to unitary authorities for 1996–97 are not available.

Specific and supplementary grants relating to education[1]

£ Million

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Clwyd	15.1	21.9	25.5	25.9	22.0	20.1
Dyfed	15.7	21.6	25.8	26.1	22.9	21.5
Gwent	16.3	23.5	28.6	28.5	23.8	23.4
Gwynedd	11.0	15.8	17.1	17.6	15.3	14.3
Mid Glamorgan	15.9	24.2	27.5	28.9	17.8	22.5
Powys	4.5	6.7	8.0	7.8	6.7	6.1
South Glamorgan	16.0	23.1	28.2	28.9	24.6	20.9
West Glamorgan	14.9	20.7	23.5	23.2	20.0	18.0

[1] Includes grants for Education Support and Training (GEST), Welsh language education, education of children of travellers and displaced persons, mandatory student awards, training agency (TVEI) and Work Related Further Education (WRFE).

Forestry

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hectares of forest have been cut down and built on since 1979; what percentage of the total area of forest in Wales this represents; and if he will make a statement. [39087]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Housing

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many housing association houses were built in each Welsh local authority in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [39093]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is given in the following table. The numbers shown are based on local authority returns which may underestimate the level of activity.

New housing association dwellings completed, by district 1993 to 1995

District	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Aberconwy	82	72	87
Alyn and Deeside	50	23	107
Arfon	74	70	29
Blaenau Gwent	0	3	71
Brecknock	21	71	54
Cardiff	420	385	356
Carmarthen	45	24	23

New housing association dwellings completed, by district 1993 to 1995

District	1993	1994	1995
Ceredigion	0	12	32
Colwyn	12	36	52
Cynon Valley	66	36	50
Delyn	131	46	49
Dinefwr	107	7	16
Dwyfor	49	17	4
Glyndwr	22	25	0
Islwyn	54	0	9
Llanelli	0	6	27
Lliw Valley	0	71	27
Meirionnydd	27	32	51
Merthyr Tydfil	30	51	51
Monmouth	124	39	89
Montgomeryshire	130	203	56
Neath	43	60	69
Newport	67	10	49
Ogwr	268	234	55
Port Talbot	22	72	11
Preseli Pembrokeshire	66	72	73
Radnorshire	63	38	50
Rhondda	58	79	40
Rhuddlan	24	108	30
Rhymney Valley	87	38	69
South Pembrokeshire	22	95	39
Swansea	347	369	356
Taff Ely	31	82	67
Torfaen	222	105	79
Vale of Glamorgan	32	41	0
Wrexham Maelor	56	200	17
Ynys Mon	1	0	14
Wales	2,721	2,746	2,064

Source:
Local authority and NHBC returns.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the numbers of council houses *(a)* newly built and *(b)* restored to use in each local authority in Wales in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [39102]

Mr. Hague: The number of council houses completed in the last five years is given in the following table. Information on the number of council houses restored to use is not collected centrally.

New local authority dwellings completed, by district

District	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Aberconwy	0	0	0	20	0
Alyn and Deeside	67	22	0	16	0
Arfon	1	20	0	0	0
Blaenau Gwent	2	0	0	0	26
Brecknock	0	0	0	0	0
Cardiff	35	6	0	0	1
Carmarthen	0	0	0	0	0
Ceredigion	37	0	0	0	0
Colwyn	0	0	0	0	0
Cynon Valley	0	0	0	0	0
Delyn	0	0	0	0	0
Dinefwr	0	0	6	0	0
Dwyfor	8	0	3	0	0
Glyndwr	0	0	0	0	0
Islwyn	0	0	0	0	0
Llanelli	98	0	31	45	78
Lliw Valley	0	0	5	0	29
Meirionnydd	12	0	0	0	0
Merthyr Tydfil	0	0	0	0	0
Monmouth	0	0	0	0	0
Montgomeryshire	31	0	0	0	0
Neath	33	0	0	0	0
Newport	0	0	6	108	4
Ogwr	0	13	0	0	0
Port Talbot	0	0	0	0	0
Preseli Pembrokeshire	18	8	14	12	0
Radnorshire	0	28	0	6	0
Rhondda	0	0	0	0	0
Rhuddlan	26	20	25	0	6
Rhymney Valley	0	0	0	0	0
South Pembrokeshire	0	0	0	0	6
Swansea	0	0	58	20	6
Taff Ely	0	0	0	0	0
Torfaen	0	0	0	0	10
Vale of Glamorgan	29	16	24	0	0
Wrexham Maelor	21	0	0	0	0
Ynys Mon	0	0	0	0	0
Wales	418	133	172	227	176

Source:
Local authority and NHBC returns.

Civil Servants

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total number of civil servants employed by his Department *(a)* broken down by category and *(b)* in total, in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [39119]

Mr. Hague: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Public Bodies (Women Appointees)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 11 June, *Official Report*, column *84*, what was, in each year since 1990, *(a)* the percentage of women holding appointments on public bodies and *(b)* the percentage of women appointees to public bodies by the year of appointment. [39545]

Mr. Hague: The information for the years 1993 to 1996 on women holding appointments is contained in "Appointments by the Secretary of State for Wales", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

For previous years, the available information is contained in the annual publication "Public Bodies", available in the Library of the House.

Departmental Vehicles (Traffic Violations)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of traffic violations involving departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39298]

Mr. Hague: There have been three violations since 1986:

1986: Speeding offence—No cost to the Department (paid by driver);

1990: Parking offence—£16;

1990: Speeding offence—No cost to the Department (paid by driver).

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in his name, or that of other Ministers in his Department, for meetings with Conservative hon. Members immediately preceding questions to his Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39526]

Mr. Hague: Nil.

SCOTLAND

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) pursuant to his answer of 22 March, *Official Report*, column *343*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested; [37520]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 28 March, *Official Report*, columns *671–72*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested. [37523]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The examination of more than 20,000 files dating back to 1987–88.

Road Signs

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the current provision of road signage on the road network marking the border between Scotland and England. [38633]

Lord James-Douglas Hamilton: The Secretary of State for Scotland is responsible for signing on the motorway and trunk road network in Scotland which includes the border routes of A7, A68, A1 and A74(M). There are currently signs on all these routes to mark the border crossings. Discussions are in progress with the Scottish tourist board to upgrade the existing signs to complement the new tourist signposts which have recently been approved throughout the rest of the trunk road network.

Basking Sharks

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy in respect of proposals to give basking sharks endangered species protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Acts; and if he will make a statement. [38810]

Mr. Kynoch: This matter is being considered as part of the current quinquennial review of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The Joint Nature Conservation Committee has already consulted widely over its proposals for additional species which should receive protection as part of the current reviews. The committee's recommendations are expected to be put to my right hon. Friend the Secretary for State for the Environment in the autumn. Full consideration will be given to the committee's recommendations before a decision is taken as to which species should be afforded protection.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the last 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39137]

Mr. Kynoch: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many staff are assumed in his Department's budget as employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, *(a)* to work on press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39471]

(2) what is the cost budgeted for staff employed full time or part time to provide information and publicity in 1996–97, specifying the law officers separately; [39453]

(3) how many staff were employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94; [39427]

(4) what was the cost of staff employed full time and part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* to work on the press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95, and (iii) 1993–94, specifying separately staff of the law officers; [39403]

(5) what is his Department's budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media, specifying separately staff of the Law Officers. [39344]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Examination Subjects (Pre-testing)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those examination subjects at *(a)* standard grade, *(b)* higher grade and *(c)* certificate of sixth year studies in which the pre-testing of questions by the Scottish Examination Board has been discontinued since 1992. [37870]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: There are no subjects in which pre-testing of examinations has been discontinued since 1992. For operational reasons higher English interpretation was not pre-tested in 1996. Pre-testing will take place as usual in 1997.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients receiving *(a)* hip replacements, *(b)* cataract extraction, *(c)* kidney transplants and *(d)* hernia operations were carried out by the NHS in Scotland had to wait for (i) more than six months, (ii) more than nine months, (iii) more than 12 months, (iv) more than 15 months and (v) more than 18 months in the most recent year for which figures are available. [38853]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table. The main factor in waiting times for kidney transplants is the availability of organs and not hospital resources.

Year ended 31 December 1995

Operation	*Total number of operations*	*Number of patients waiting*				
		Greater than six months	*Greater than nine months*	*Greater than 12 months*	*Greater than 15 months*	*Greater than 18 months*
Cataract extraction	15,010	2,951	957	226	109	37
Kidney transplants	43	18	11	6	4	2
Hernia operation	9,045	1,296	552	171	74	36
Hip replacements	3,975	916	387	103	31	12

All figures are provisional.

Edinburgh Royal Infirmary

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will name the consortiums bidding to develop the new Edinburgh royal infirmary under the private finance initiative; and when he expects to announce the preferred bidder. [38800]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are two consortiums currently under consideration by the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS trust for the development of the new facility. These are:

Consort (consisting of Royal Bank of Scotland, BICC and others).

Alliance (consisting of John Laing, the British Linen Bank and others).

The selection and announcement of preferred bidder is entirely a matter for the trust, which is currently indicating a decision in September.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his current estimate of the cost of the new Edinburgh royal infirmary *(a)* under the private finance initiative scheme and *(b)* as a conventional public sector development; and if he will publish an analysis of the differences between those alternatives. [38802]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The current conventional public sector option estimate of capital cost of the new royal infirmary building is £178 million. Fees, on-costs and equipment may add approximately £60 million to this figure.

The private finance costs are currently subject to a competitive process and figures are not yet known.

The preferred private sector bid will be compared to the public option in a full business case, to be approved by Scottish Office Ministers, who will be accountable to Parliament for the decision process outlined in the document.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations are being undertaken with NHS trusts and local authorities in the Lothian area about reductions in existing hospital services in anticipation of the development of the new Edinburgh royal infirmary; what is the timetable for those consultations; and if he will make a statement. [38799]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Clinical activity is expected to rise in the Lothian health board area in future years. The new Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh will play a key part in providing the services needed to meet this increased activity. Lothian health board consulted widely on its plans for acute hospital services before its acute services strategy was approved.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many beds are being planned for the new Edinburgh royal infirmary; and if he will make a statement on changes from the original proposal. [38801]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of beds at the new Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh will be determined in the light of forecast numbers of patients to be treated and developments in patterns of treatment. These are matters for the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS trust to discuss with the consortiums tendering for the project.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the health service projects in Scotland in respect of which unsuccessful efforts have been made to pursue funding under the private finance initiative since 1 January 1995. [38814]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The following projects have actively explored PFI options in that they have openly advertised inviting proposals, and have been unsuccessful in these explorations.

Borders General Hospital NHS Trust (Day Case Unit)

Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust (Child and Family Psychiatry Unit)

Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust (Challenging Behaviour Unit)

West Glasgow Hospitals University NHS Trust (Infectious Diseases Unit)

Yorkhill NHS Trust (Theatres Complex)

West Lothian NHS Trust (Intensive Psychiatric Care Unit)

Southern General Hospitals NHS Trust ('Westmarc' Centre)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has collated regarding expenditure incurred by each health board and NHS hospital trust in Scotland in unsuccessfully pursuing funding for projects through the private finance initiative since 1 January 1995; and if he will make a statement. [38815]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The projects which have unsuccessfully pursued PFI options have been listed previously. Expenditure incurred during these explorations is not recorded and held centrally. However, expenditure will be minimal as each project discovered that PFI was not a viable option at an early stage, shortly after advertising the scheme. Only internal management time can be attributed to this exploration. Each scheme is now proceeding as a publicly funded project.

The NHS executive operates a capital investment panel which advises trusts on the capital investment process. All capital schemes should normally explore PFI options. However, where a PFI option is not realistic, Government guidance allows that a full exploration need not take place. Based on the evidence of precedents, experience and informal soundings, the capital investment panel is able to indicate to a trust or board that a PFI exploration is likely to be fruitless and that a full exploration is not expected.

In-patient Admissions

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of ordinary in-patient admissions by region in each of the last four years. [39200]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the following table:

Health board of residence	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Argyll and Clyde	80,883	83,740	86,547	87,814
Ayrshire and Arran	68,557	70,219	76,128	75,154
Borders	18,274	19,109	19,633	19,836
Dumfries and Galloway	26,808	27,533	29,800	30,139
Fife	56,348	57,967	57,128	58,964
Forth Valley	45,934	47,979	47,909	47,438
Grampian	91,121	92,807	94,934	95,101
Greater Glasgow	180,740	179,048	188,255	188,190
Highland	34,960	36,673	37,320	38,711
Lanarkshire	95,097	96,623	102,722	102,524
Lothian	127,082	134,493	140,267	141,913
Orkney	3,082	3,196	3,332	3,267
Shetland	3,682	3,933	4,035	4,241
Tayside	74,864	75,794	75,149	74,776
Western Isles	5,654	5,989	6,421	6,729
Scotland Total	913,086	935,103	969,580	974,797

Health Service Staff

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list by health board the number of *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* midwives, *(d)* health visitors, *(e)* administration and clerical staff and *(f)* managers in (i) 1990, (ii) 1992, (iii) 1994 and (iv) 1995; [39198]

(2) if he will list the overall number of *(a)* administrative staff, *(b)* managerial staff, *(c)* nurses, *(d)* junior doctors and *(e)* other medical staff employed in each region for each of the last four years. [39199]

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* managers, *(b)* nurses and *(c)* nurses in training there were in the Scottish NHS in (i) 1989 and (ii) 1995. [39321]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Members as soon as possible.

Speech Therapy

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial resources he made available to local authorities in Scotland in each of the last three financial years to make provision for speech therapy for recorded children; and what level of resources has been made available for 1996–97. [38980]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Under arrangements which came into force in 1992, education authorities contract with health boards or other providers for the provision of speech therapy services to meet the needs of recorded children. The following sums have been included in the annual local government settlement for this purpose: in 1993–94, £2 million; in 1994–95, £3 million; in 1995–96, £3 million; and in 1996–97, £3 million.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many recorded children in each local authority area received speech therapy as a direct result of the funding made available by him for that purpose in each of the last three financial years. [38982]

Mr. Robertson: This information is not held centrally.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps are taken to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of expenditure incurred for the provision of speech therapy for recorded children. [38981]

Mr. Robertson: The discharge of the statutory duty to make adequate provision of speech and language therapy for a recorded child, where this has been identified as one of the child's special educational needs, is the responsibility of the education authority. This is achieved by the education authority contracting with health boards and other providers of speech and language therapy services, and it is for the education authority to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this expenditure.

School Placements

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the target period within which a parent should receive a decision, by a local authority, on a requested school placement. [38977]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Section 28 A(1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, as amended, requires education authorities to respond to requests for a place at school at the start of the school year in August by 30 April of that year if the request was lodged before 15 March in the same year, or within two months of receipt if the request was made after that date. Education authorities must also respond within two months of receipt of placing requests made in-year. Where an education authority fails to respond within the time limit it is deemed to have refused the request.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what statutory duty a local authority has in relation to considering a school placement request by a parent. [38978]

Mr. Robertson: Where the parents of a child make a written request to an eduation authority to place that child in a specified school, section 28A(1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 places a duty on the education authority to place that child accordingly unless one or more of a number of grounds of exception set out in section 28A(3) applies. Those grounds are as follows:

(a) If placing the child in the specified school would

i. make it necessary for the authority to take an additional teacher into employment;

ii. give rise to significant expenditure on extending or otherwise altering the accommodation at or facilities provided in connection with the school;

iii. be seriously detrimental to the continuity of the child's education; or

iv. be likely to be seriously detrimental to order and discipline in the school or the educational well-being of the pupils there;

(b) if the education normally provided at the specified school is not suited to the age, ability or aptitude of the child;

(c) if the education authority has already required the child to discontinue his attendance at the specified school;

(d) if, where the specified school is a special school, the child does not have special educational needs requiring the education or facilities normally provided at that school;

(e) if the specified school is a single sex school (within the meaning givne to that expression by section 26 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975) and the child is not of the sex admitted or taken (under that section) to be admitted to the school.

A change in the Education (Scotland) Act 1996 which will come into force shortly introduces a further ground which will enable an education authority to refuse a placing request. That further ground is where the acceptance of a placing request in respect of a child who is resident outwith the catchment area of the school specified in the request would prevent the education authority from retaining reserved places at the school for children moving into the area.

Under the 1980 Act authorities are also obliged to formulate guidelines to be followed in respect of placing in schools generally, or in the event of there being more placing requests than there are places available at a particular school.

Records of Needs

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the target period for completion of an appeal to the Secretary of State on a record of needs; how many appeals on records of needs he has received in each of the last three financial years; and what was the average time taken in each of the last three financial years to finalise Secretary of State appeals on record of needs. [38979]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The number of appeals to the Secretary of State under section 64 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 in each of the last three financial years was seven in 1993–94, nine in 1994–95 and 14 in 1995–96. There is no target period set for completion of an appeal to the Secretary of State. Appeals determined in each of the last three financial years took on average 54 weeks in 1993–94, 93 weeks in 1994–95 and 85 weeks in 1995–96.

Departmental Vehicles (Traffic Violations)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of traffic violations involving Departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39302]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is not held centrally; traffic violations are dealt with between the individual concerned and the police.

Private Hospital Beds

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many private beds there were in *(a)* NHS hospitals and *(b)* private hospitals in 1989 and 1995. [39316]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There were 113 private beds available in NHS hospitals in 1989. Data on private beds in the NHS are no longer collected. Information on private hospitals is not held centrally.

Elective Surgery

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of elective surgery operations carried out *(a)* under the NHS and *(b)* privately in (i) 1989 and (ii) 1995. [39318]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what account measures to reduce hospital waiting lists take of medical priority; and if he will make a statement. [39283]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Health boards and NHS trusts must always give priority to medical considerations when undertaking measures to reduce the time patients wait for treatment.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were covered by private medical insurance in 1989 and 1995. [39317]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Health Service Waiting Lists

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to reduce waiting lists in the NHS; and what estimate he has made of the costs of these plans. [39282]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The national health service in Scotland has successfully reduced the time patients wait for treatment. The Government expect health boards to increase and improve the guarantees on waiting times that they give to their resident population, and provide appropriate funding through the revenue allocation formula.

MEP for Strathclyde, West

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received in the last year from the Member of the European Parliament for Strathclyde, West concerning constituents of the hon. Member for Eastwood; and if he will send copies of these representations to the hon. Member for Eastwood. [39646]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Member of the European Parliament for Strathclyde, West wrote to my right hon. Friend on 13 June making representations about press reports on the alleged distribution of material relating to Reid Kerr college by a political party. I replied on 8 July indicating that the matter was being investigated. These inquiries are continuing.

Reid Kerr College, Paisley

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the members of staff of Reid Kerr college, Paisley, who are elected representatives of the Labour party. [39658]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will examine all contracts for roofing and re-roofing allocated by Reid Kerr college, Paisley, since it came under Scottish Office control, with special reference to ensuring these contracts conformed to the Government's announced policy on competitive tendering. [39645]

Mr. Robertson: As the House is rising today for the summer recess, I shall make the necessary inquiries and write to my hon. Friend when these are complete.

Crofting Land (Allocation)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what criteria he uses for the allocation of crofting land to new tenants; and if he will make a statement. [39576]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: My noble Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and the Environment will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Clyde Port Authority

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the years in which the Clyde port authority has failed to make annual reports to his Department; and if he will make a statement. [39563]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Residential Care Home Registration (Report)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to receive the report from the working group on residential care home registration procedures; and if he will make a statement. [39973]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The working group recently submitted its report to my right hon. Friend and copies will be placed in the Library of the House and distributed widely among interested bodies. The report makes a large number of recommendations for change under three main groups: guidance and administrative action, subordinate legislation and primary legislation. The Government have a duty to ensure that people in residential care are properly looked after and that high standards of care prevail and we therefore propose that work be put in hand now to take forward a substantial number of these recommendations straight away.

We accept and have already begun work on the guidance recommendations. These cover closer working arrangements between local authorities and health boards, particularly the development of joint inspection units, training, pre-registration activity and registration criteria including those for supported housing and, subject to further consideration, cancellation procedures and the removal of residents from homes. In addition, we propose to take forward the recommendations for setting up a national consultative group to devise and promote nationally recommended guidelines and quality of care standards and for a national list of persons whose registration has been refused or cancelled. The recommendations requiring subordinate legislation will also be taken forward, notably reviewing the prescribed form of application for registration, Scottish Criminal Record Office checks, notification of change of key personnel and maintenance of residents' records. These changes, taken together, will help clarify local authority procedures and promote good practice.

The usual consultations with the appropriate bodies will be undertaken on all of these matters. We will also consider very carefully those recommendations which are dependent on primary legislation. Some are quite far-reaching such as the recommendation that the manager of a care home should not also be a resident's GP or professional adviser. Others are designed to simplify and streamline existing procedures. We intend to consult fully on these proposals before reaching a firm view.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the commitment of the members of the working group and the helpful and co-operative way which they went about their task.

Fishing Vessels (Transfers)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will instigate a joint policy with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to implement the option available under article 8 of Council regulation EC No. 3699/93 of allowing vessels to be permanently transferred to a third country and permanently re-assigned for uses other than fishing in Community waters; and if he will make a statement. [40099]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Scottish Water Authorities

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what reduction has been made to the external financing limits of the Scottish water authorities consequent upon the commutation of debt announced on 8 February 1996. [39972]

Mr. Kynoch: Local authority debt of £0.7 billion was commuted before being transferred to the new water authorities on 1 April this year.

As a consequence, a reduction has been made in the authorities' external financing limits to reflect the reduced debt servicing charges. The table shows the external financing limits for 1996–97, pre- and post-commutation, of the three authorities:

£ million

	Pre-commutation	*Post-commutation*
North of Scotland Water Authority	82	65.9
East of Scotland Water Authority	87	70
West of Scotland Water Authority	105.3	83.9
Total	274.3	219.8

These reductions ensure that there is no increase or decrease in public expenditure provision for the water authorities as a result of the debt commutation.

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in his name, or that of the other Ministers in his Department, for meetings with Conservative hon. Members immediately preceding questions to his Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39515]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Meetings at which hon. Members of only one party are present are not the responsibility of my Department.

Knab Graveyard Extension

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he proposes to issue a consent notice under section 80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, in response to a request from Shetland Islands Council relating to an alleged statutory nuisance at the Knab Graveyard extension, Lerwick. [37864]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* No. On the basis of the information available at the time of the request from Shetland Islands council, it was not considered appropriate to use the consent power in section 79(10) of the Act. I understand that the matter has been referred to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency which is considering the terms of an authorisation under part I of the Act. The agency has received no complaints about dust nuisance at the site since 4 June.

Rural Land Use

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what strategic powers he has over development on private landed estates in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [37994]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The cornerstone of the legislative framework governing development on private landed estates in Scotland is the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972 as amended. This provides the basis for development plans—structure and local plans—and for development control and other related matters.

Structure plans provide the strategic land use planning framework for 10 to 15 years ahead and are prepared by planning authorities. They must be approved by the Secretary of State before they come into force. He may approve structure plans with or without modification, or reject them.

The vast majority of decisions on planning applications are taken by planning authorities. However, the Secretary of State has powers to call in any planning application or appeal for his own determination.

Mortality Statistics

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many deaths have been recorded in Scotland for each of the past 10 years in the period December to March; [38051]

(2) what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage rate of excess winter mortalities in each of the last 10 years. [38053]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* There is no universally accepted definition of excess winter deaths and it would not be possible to calculate a rate for these. The total number of deaths in the period December to March for each of the past 10 years are as follows:

Winter	*December–March*
1985–86	24,762
1986–87	22,577
1987–88	22,317
1988–89	22,079
1989–90	25,497
1990–91	21,859
1991–92	22,217
1992–93	22,416
1993–94	22,504
1994–95	21,510

Beaufort's Dyke

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made on the Scottish Office Marine Laboratory survey in and around Beaufort's dyke; when and how he expects the results to be published; and if he will make a statement. [38974]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* The survey is in progress and will, on present plans, conclude at the end of July 1996. The results will thereafter be published in full as soon as they have been collated and analysed.

DEFENCE

Plutonium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the United States Government have since 1966 requested the United Kingdom to provide reactor grade plutonium for the purpose of conducting a nuclear test explosion under the provisions of the US–UK mutual defence agreement on atomic energy co-operation. [38500]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No such requests have been made by the United States.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the last 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39141]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Government recognise the crucial role played by small firms in the UK economy and aim to help them by providing sound economic conditions—keeping inflation and interest rates low; reducing legislative administrative and taxation burdens; and where appropriate provide direct assistance in the form of specialist advice and support and easing access to finance.

My Department supports the DTI's small business measures and initiatives. I am the Minister within this Department for small businesses and I attend or am represented at the DTI's regular meetings.

The Defence Suppliers Service assists companies, including small businesses, in making contact with appropriate contracts branches. It also arranges for details of many forthcoming tenders to be published in the fortnightly MOD *Contracts Bulletin* which is available to any interested party on subscription. This enables small businesses either to seek to tender directly for specific requirements or, more commonly, to become sub-contractors to larger companies.

Since the Procurement Executive of the Ministry of Defence moved to the new procurement headquarters at Abbey Wood near Bristol earlier this year, the Defence Suppliers Service is in contact with the Bristol chamber of commerce and DTI's business links, whose south-west regional supply network office has become their national focal point for the defence industry. Other areas of the country can reach my Department, and be reached by us, through the business links network.

As much of the assistance provided by my Department to small businesses tends to be in the sub-contractor sector, it is not possible to establish suitable performance parameters and therefore no statistics are available.

Rendlesham Forest (Incident)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what response his Department made to the report submitted by Lieutenant Colonel Charles Halt relating to events in Rendlesham forest in December 1980; what interviews were held; and if he will make a statement; [39247]

(2) who assessed that the events around RAF Woodbridge and RAF Bentwaters in December 1980, which were reported to his Department by Lieutenant Colonel Charles Halt were of no defence significance; on what evidence the assessment was made; what analysis of events was carried out; and if he will make a statement. [39249]

Mr. Soames: The report was assessed by the staff in my Department responsible for air defence matters. Since the judgment was that it contained nothing of defence significance no further action was taken.

Uncorrelated Radar Tracks (Investigations)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions RAF aircraft have been *(a)* scrambled and *(b)* diverted from task to investigate uncorrelated targets picked up on radar; and if he will make a statement. [39218]

Mr. Soames: In the past five years RAF aircraft have been scrambled or diverted from task on two occasions to intercept and identify uncorrelated radar tracks entering the United Kingdom air defence region.

Unidentified Craft

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is his Department's assessment of the incident that occurred on 5 November 1990 when a patrol of RAF Tornado aircraft flying over the North sea were overtaken at high speed by an unidentified craft; and if he will make a statement; [39245]

(2) if he will make a statement on the unidentified flying object sighting reported to his Department by the meteorological officer at RAF Shawbury in the early hours of 31 March 1993. [39246]

Mr. Soames: Reports of sightings on these dates are recorded on file and were examined by staff responsible for air defence matters. No firm conclusions were drawn about the nature of the phenomena reported but the events were not judged to be of defence significance.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department made of the photograph of an unidentified craft at Calvine on 4 August 1990; who removed it from an office in secretariat (air staff) 2a; for what reasons; and if he will make a statement. [39248]

Mr. Soames: A number of negatives associated with the sighting were examined by staff responsible for air defence matters. Since it was judged that they contained nothing of defence significance the negatives were not retained and we have no record of any photographs having been taken from them.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media. [39353]

Mr. Soames: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the cost of staff employed full time or part time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work on the press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94; [39436]

(2) how many staff were employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94. [39415]

Mr. Soames: In 1995–96 we employed a combination of 170 military and civilian staff to cover both the MOD and the armed forces press and public relations activities worldwide. They include staff working on the major service and civilian in-house newspapers and magazines. Of the total number of staff employed 69 were service personnel.

As at March 1995—for 1994–95—the figure was 160. For 1993–94 the figure was 175.

The total annual salary bill for these personnel for 1995–96 is estimated at £6.6 million. Actual outturn is spread across many budgets and could be collected only at disproportionate cost. Figures for 1994–95 and 1993–94 are not available.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many staff employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, are budgeted to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39380]

(2) how many staff are assumed in his Department's budget, employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, *(a)* to work on the press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39364]

(3) what is the cost budgeted for staff, employed full time or part time, to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39440]

(4) what is the cost, assumed in the budget, of people employed full time or part time to work on the press and media in 1996–97. [39974]

Mr. Soames: We employ a combination of 174 military and civilian staff to cover both the MOD and the armed forces press and public relations activities worldwide. They include staff working on the major Service and civilian in-house newspapers and magazines. Of the total number of staff employed, 59 are service personnel.

The total annual salary budgeted for these personnel in 1996–97 is £6.6 million.

It is not practical to differentiate between work on press and media, and information and publicity.

Recruitment and Retention

Sir Jim Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to improve recruitment and retention in the armed forces. [39640]

Mr. Portillo: A number of measures are being taken to encourage recruiting and retention in the armed forces. These include targeted recruitment advertising campaigns; payment of a recruiting bounty to marines and soldiers who persuade others to enlist; and payment of a retention bonus to those who serve beyond the three-year commitment in the Royal Marines and the Army where most shortages occur.

There was a much improved level of recruitment in the final quarter of 1995–96 and that has continued into the current year. In the first quarter of this year there was a 53 per cent. increase in Army enlistments compared with the same period last year; enlistments into the infantry have almost doubled. In addition, over a similar period, there has been a 35 per cent. increase in applications for Royal Marines, general duties.

The Government have also been considering the proposals made by Sir Michael Bett's independent review of the services' manpower, career and remuneration structure.

My guiding principle is to seek to develop terms and conditions that will enable the services to recruit and retain people of the right calibre and with the mix of skills required for our armed forces in the future.

More work is still required on detailed options. It is likely that those will be set out in a report later this year which would provide the basis for an information exercise within the forces.

Medical Reservists (Bosnia)

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many medical reservists are currently serving in Bosnia, broken down by medical specialty. [38688]

Mr. Soames: There are 58 medical reservists currently serving in Bosnia, 52 of whom are attached to the Royal Army Medical Corps. They comprise 48 combat medical technicians, three medical officers and one anaesthetist. The remaining six reservists are nursing officers with the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps.

Defence Sales

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) of 9 July, *Official Report*, column *130*, (1) if he will publish a similar table covering the sale of Government-to-Government warlike platforms; and if he will define the term warlike platform; [38208]

(2) if he will state if the sales included *(a)* special clothing and *(b)* laundry or decontamination equipment for biological and chemical protection. [38207]

Mr. Arbuthnot: These are matters for the Disposal Sales Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Keith Ellender to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 24 July 1996:

I am replying to your Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence, asked in response to the Answer given to the Honourable Member for Pendle on 9th July, Official Report, Column 130. These matters fall within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Disposal Sales Agency.

The question to which my answer of 9 July referred, related to surplus uniforms, other clothing and non-combat equipment. In order to respond to the question, the term non-combat equipment was deemed to exclude Government to Government sales of ships, aircraft, armoured vehicles, artillery, missiles, ammunition and other armaments. The figures requested for these sales are as follows:

Financial year	£ million
1990–91	16.8
1991–92	8.2
1992–93	21.6
1993–94	39.1
1994–95	23.3
1995–96	38.6

The figures given in my earlier answer did not include sales of laundry or decontamination equipment for biological and chemical protection. Nor did they include sales of special clothing, if special clothing is to be interpreted as Nuclear Biological and Chemical clothing.

Military Provost Guard Service

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will include a psychological testing programme as part of selection procedures used for military provost guard service personnel to be employed in the policing of his Department's establishments before the commencement of the pilot study in April 1997. [38151]

Mr. Soames: Military provost guard service personnel will be trained soldiers, employed on guarding duties at Army establishments, not policing duties. There are no plans to include a psychological testing programme in the selection procedures for military provost guard service personnel.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the proposed procedures of independently investigating complaints against personnel of the military provost guard service; [38125]

(2) if he will set up an independent investigation authority to investigate complaints against personnel of the military provost guard service, before the commencement of the pilot study of the policing of his Department's establishments in April 1997. [38126]

Mr. Soames: My Department will not be setting up an independent investigation authority to investigate complaints against personnel of the military provost guard service. All military provost guard service soldiers will be subject to military law and Queen's Regulations for the Army and are answerable to their commanding officers, like any other soldier, on all discipline issues. Any complaints by members of the public against military provost guard service will be investigated fully by the relevant authorities. Offences by service personnel in the United Kingdom affecting the persons or property of civilians must, except in some minor cases, be reported to the civil police so that a decision can be taken by the appropriate prosecuting authority on jurisdiction.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what types of checks are proposed for the military provost guard service personnel before they are able to carry and use the 5.56 mm SA80 high velocity rifle; and how frequently these checks are made; [38119]

(2) what type of assessment is proposed for the military provost guard service personnel's ability to carry and use arms; what checks will exist for different types of arms; and how frequently these checks will be made before the commencement of the pilot study of the policing of Ministry of Defence establishments in April 1997. [38128]

Mr. Soames: Military provost guard service soldiers will be recruited to Army training directive standards. All soldiers complete an annual personal weapons test (trained soldier)—valid for one year—on their personal weapon each year. MPGS soldiers will make periodic practices with their personal weapon at the direction of their commanding officer as a routine part of their soldiers' continuation training.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he has held over the suitability of the 5.56 mm SA80 high velocity rifle, for the policing, guarding and security of Ministry of Defence establishments. [38120]

Mr. Soames: Consultation has taken place with specialist departments within Government on the suitability of the 5.56 mm SA80 high velocity rifle to meet the policing, guarding and security requirements of my Department's establishments.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the length and type of training which will be required of military provost guard service for the policing of his Department's establishments, before the commencement of the pilot study of the policing of his Department's establishments in April 1997. [38122]

Mr. Soames: Military provost guard service personnel will be employed on guarding duties at Army establishments. They will not undertake any policing duties. The training requirements for military provost guard service soldiers were set out in a consultative document, "Defence Policing and Guarding Structures", issued by my Department in December 1995, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the selection procedures proposed for selection of military provost guard service personnel. [38124]

Mr. Soames: The main source of recruits for the military provost guard service is expected to be full engagement regular soldiers who have served six years in the armed forces. Their suitability for employment in the military provost guard service will be based on their service confidential reports and an interview. Any recruits without previous military experience will first be required to undergo and pass the Army common military syllabus (recruits) course. All military provost guard service recruits will be expected to meet physical standards which enable them to pass the Army bi-annual basic fitness test for their age group.

MOD Police

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the selection procedures currently used for Ministry of Defence police personnel employed in policing his Department's establishments. [38123]

Mr. Soames: The Ministry of Defence police apply recruitment criteria similar to those in general use in the police service. These include the national police initial recruitment test, a medical examination and a physical fitness test. There is also a group discussion exercise, two written exercises and a structured interview, evaluated by

trainee assessors. The process accords with procedures set out by the Bramshill police staff college. The assessment also includes consideration of the suitability of the applicant to be trained in the use of and to handle firearms.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what type of assessment is currently made on the Ministry of Defence police personnel's ability to carry and use arms; what checks exist for different types of arms; and how frequently these checks are made; [38127]

(2) what checks are currently made on Ministry of Defence police personnel before they are able to carry and use the 5.56 mm SA 80 high velocity rifle; and how frequently these checks are made. [38129]

Mr. Soames: All potential recruits to the Ministry of Defence police prior to recruitment are assessed over a three-day period for their suitability for police training. This includes an assessment of their suitability for firearms training, made by experienced trainers qualified to Association of Chief Police Officers guidelines standards. Those who are successful and join the MDP receive a 15-week recruit course which contains 20 days' training on two types of firearms, the 5.56 mm SA80 high velocity rifle and the 9 mm Browning pistol. Failure to achieve a satisfactory and safe standard on both weapons leads to failure of the course and termination of employment with MDP. The recruits are assessed on their skills, attitude, accuracy and safe handling of the weapons. Dependent on the role of the police officer, the qualities are re-checked, and the individual officers required to re-qualify on the weapons, every three or four months throughout their careers.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the length and type of training required of Ministry of Defence police for the policing of his Department's establishments. [38121]

Mr. Soames: Recruits to the Ministry of Defence police undertake a 15-week residential probationer's foundation training course at the police training centre, MDP Wethersfield. Its purpose is to help officers develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes to act competently, with confidence and integrity and to provide a high quality service to my Department and the community. It includes training in essential skills and knowledge of the law through written, oral and practical exercises. Further training in supervisory and specialist skills, and refresher courses, is given during an MDP officer's career.

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in his name, or that of other Ministers in his Department, for meetings with Conservative Members immediately preceding questions to his Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39519]

Mr. Portillo: So far as I am aware, no bookings have been made in my name or those of my departmental ministerial colleagues. But it is my practice to meet Conservative Members who have an interest in defence matters, on the day of defence questions, usually in a ministerial conference room.

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. [38985]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the hon. Members for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) and for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 10 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *216*.

Married Quarters Estate

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the areas of land involved in his Department's sale of the married quarters estate which were acquired or requisitioned under the Defence Acts of 1842 and 1873 and the Land Powers (Defence Act) 1958; [39331]

(2) if land compulsorily purchased or requisitioned will be first offered back to the original owners involved in his Department's sale of the married quarters estate; [39332]

(3) what assessment he made of the Crichel Down regulations in the formulation of his Department's plans to sell the married quarters housing stock; [38780]

(4) if he will place in the Library a copy of the legal advice he has received on the implications of the Crichel Down regulations for his Department's plans to sell the married quarters housing stock; [38782]

(5) if he will list the properties which his Department proposes to include in the sale of married quarters housing stock which are currently being considered in relation to the Crichel Down regulations; and what is the estimated retail value of these properties. [38781]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* I will write to the hon. Member.

Departmental Vehicles (Traffic Violations)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of traffic violations involving Departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39311]

Mr. Soames: This information is not held centrally.

Radiation (Greenham)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the 1997 report by W. N. Saxby into radiation levels around Greenham. [39699]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member.

Hospital Beds

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many hospital beds were managed by his Department in each of the last five years. [39767]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member.

Parliamentary Questions (Arms Sales)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to report to Parliament on his review of the criteria adopted to judge whether to provide substantive answers to parliamentary questions tabled on arms sales. [39735]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) yesterday *Official Report*, columns *212–13*.

Greenham Airbase (Accident)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) where the remains of the B47 bomber which was destroyed by fire at Greenham airbase on 28 February 1958 are; and when and how they were put there; [39695]

(2) how many *(a)* British and *(b)* United States reports were produced concerning the accident at Greenham airbase which was referred to in the report by Cripps and Stimson; how many of the reports have been made public; and if he will place a copy of each of these reports in the Library; [39697]

(3) if *(a)* the hangar and *(b)* the B47 bomber, referred to in the report by Cripps and Stimson, contained uranium. [39700]

(4) where the remains of the hangar which was destroyed by fire at Greenham airbase on 28 February 1958 are; and when and how they were put there; [39696]

(5) what reports there have been into accidents at Greenham airbase involving uranium since 1966; and if he will place a copy of each in the Library; [39766]

(6) where, in relation to the main runway at Greenham airbase, was the B47 bomber which was referred to in the report by Cripps and Stimson which he placed in the Library; [39694]

(7) for what reasons the report by Cripps and Stimson which he placed in the Library last week was not released in accordance with the normal 30-year rule. [39698]

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the official service inquiry report of the accident at Greenham common on 28 February 1958 involving a B47 bomber. [39790]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Members.

Housing Stock

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what are his Department's current plans for the construction of accommodation at RAF Boulmer; and what is the cost to his Department; [39787]

(2) if accommodation currently being constructed by his Department at *(a)* Catterick garrison, *(b)* RAF Boulmer and *(c)* Albemarle barracks is included in his plans for the sale of his Department's housing stock; [39789]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 15 July, *Official Report*, column *359*, what is the total cost of his Department's current accommodation construction projects. [39786]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member.

Radiation (Newbury)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what further tests of radiation levels in the Newbury district he proposes should be carried out; [39801]

(2) what tests of radiation levels in the Newbury district, other than those reported in the Cripps and Stimson 1961 report, and the Boocock and Marriage 1986 report, have been conducted since 1958. [39802]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member.

Uranium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's 1991 report "Kuwait—Depleted Uranium Contamination"; [39737]

(2) if he will place in the Library a list of all reports prepared or commissioned by his Department since August 1990, on the potential hazards to human health and the environment posed by the use of depleted uranium shells; and what discussions Ministers or officials of his Department have had with Kuwaiti Ministers or officials regarding the use of depleted uranium shells by allied forces during Operation Granby. [39764]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member.

Reserve Forces (Doctors and Nurses)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many doctors and nurses there were *(a)* in the forces and *(b)* in the reserve forces in each of the last five years. [39768]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member.

Defence Statistics

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under which sub-heads in tables 1.2 and 1.8 inclusive of the UK Defence Statistics 1996 his Department's nuclear weapons and nuclear submarine propulsion costs are subsumed. [39734]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I will write to the hon. Member.

Albemarle Barracks

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his Department's current plans for the construction of accommodation at Albemarle barracks; and what is the cost to his Department. [39788]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many visits (i) he and (ii) his Ministers made to *(a)* the Newbury constituency and *(b)* other constituencies in the last 12 months. [39872]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member.

Postal and Courier Services Agency

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency in 1996–97. [39882]

Mr. Soames: The chief executive of the Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency has been set the following key targets for 1996–97:

(a) Under "Competing for Quality", expose £2 million of agency business to competition by 31 March 1998.

(b) Under the private fiance initiative, pursue the automation fo FPO counters worldwide with Post Office Counters Ltd., ICL, IBM and the Benefits Agency, by 31 March 2001.

(c) Implement the triennial review recommendations by 31 March 1999.

(d) Identify the ratio of overheads to outputs (year 1) and establish savings targets (year 2) and achieve targets (year 3), by 31 March 1999.

(e) Achieve the quality mark BS EN ISO 9002 for the Defence Courier Service by 31 March 1997.

(f) Achieve "Investors in People" standard for DPCSA by December 1996.

(g) Update military core capability to respond to the armed forces requirements for peace, international tension and war, ratify and implement the force requirement table by 31 March 1998.

(h) Rationalise funding, technical responsibility and reorganisation of PCS assets currently operating under other TLBs after the triennial review by 31 March 1998.

(j) Benchmark unit costs of output with the Post Office over a three-year period ending 31 March 1999.

Procurement Announcements

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement on *(a)* the replacement maritime aircraft, *(b)* the conventionally armed stand-off missile and *(c)* the air-launched anti-armour missile; and if he will make a statement. [39176]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* Announcements will be made at the earliest convenient time after our decisions have been made.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the last 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39146]

Mr. Newton: The functions of the Privy Council Office do not include the provision of assistance to small businesses.

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Lord President of the Council on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in his name for meetings with Conservative Members immediately preceding questions to his Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39517]

Mr. Newton: I have meetings with hon. Members as and when necessary to discuss a wide variety of matters. Records are not kept which would enable the distinction on the type of meeting to be drawn.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Lord President of the Council (1) how many staff were employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94; [39425]

(2) what is the cost budgeted for staff, employed full time or part time, to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39450]

(3) what was the cost of staff employed full time or part time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work on the press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94; [39405]

(4) how many staff are assumed in his Department's budget, employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, *(a)* to work on press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39469]

(5) what is his Department's budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and the media. [39383]

Mr. Newton: No Privy Council staff have been employed full time or part time for duties exclusively concerned with information and publicity or the press and the media in any of the years 1995–96, 1994–95 and 1993–94, and none is so employed during the current financial year. There is no provision in my Department's budget for the current financial year for consultants to assist with these matters.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Amess: To ask the Lord President of the Council what account the Government's tackling drugs strategy has taken of the use of *(a)* Khat, *(b)* GHB and *(c)* Cake in the United Kingdom. [38969]

Mr. Newton: The Government's "Tackling Drugs Together" strategy focuses on controlled drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The ministerial sub-committee of the Cabinet on the misuse of drugs, which I chair, keeps under review the position on all other drugs.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Schools (Security)

18. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what extra resources she is making available for security in schools. [37285]

26. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the security of children in schools. [37296]

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring).

Sensory Impairment

19. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she has taken to monitor the levels of employment and unemployment among young people with sensory impairments after they leave full-time education or training. [37286]

Mr. Paice: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone).

30. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she intends to take to improve access to mainstream education for children with sensory impairments. [37301]

Mrs. Gillan: Local education authorities have a duty to secure, subject to certain conditions, education of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Governing bodies of such schools are under a duty to use their best endeavours to secure the special educational provision needed for a pupil with SEN. Some 800 mainstream schools will benefit from schools access initiative projects in 1996–97 to improve access to the curriculum for disabled pupils, including those with sensory impairments.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

20. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the take-up of nursery vouchers in the designated pilot areas. [37287]

Mr. Robin Squire: Applications for nursery education vouchers have been made in respect of 91 per cent. of the estimated number of eligible four-year-olds in the four areas in the first phase of the scheme.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 16 July, *Official Report*, column *736*, what research has been commissioned to evaluate the operation of the nursery voucher scheme, by organisations other than her Department, including voluntary organisations and non-governmental agencies; and in each case, what was *(a)* the objective of the research project, *(b)* the cost, *(c)* the time frame and *(d)* the expected date of the publication of the findings. [38851]

Mr. Squire: I understand that the Audit Commission, the National Children's Bureau, the Pre-school Learning Alliance and the Day Care Trust have plans to evaluate or have already evaluated aspects of the nursery education voucher scheme. Detailed information on their studies is a matter for these bodies.

The scheme comes within the ambit of the Department's internal audit division and will be reviewed by them, working with the National Audit Office, in the usual way.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the total costs of the nursery voucher initiative to her Department, separately identifying *(a)* staffing costs and *(b)* consultancy and outside agency fees (i) to date and (ii) projected up to 31 March 1997. [38852]

Mr. Squire: The estimated cost of the nursery voucher scheme from April 1995 is £26,950,000 to 31 March 1997. Of this, payments in respect of vouchers account for by far the largest proportion; departmental staffing costs are estimated at £340,000 to date, and £950,000 to March 1997. Figures exclude consultancy and outside agency fees which remain commercially confidential.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimates she has made of the capital programme required for each of the education authorities operating the pre-school voucher scheme for the year 1997–98 that will enable them to provide sufficient accommodation for pupils eligible to receive pre-school education and not able to attend additional settings provided by the voluntary sector. [39684]

Mr. Squire: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Grant-maintained Schools

21. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she is taking to monitor standards in the grant-maintained sector. [37289]

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland).

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each local education authority in England and Wales the number of children aged five to 16 years attending grant-maintained schools as a percentage of all children aged five to 16 years resident in the authority's area. [39560]

Mr. Squire: I will write to my hon. Friend with the information requested and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Universities (Standards)

22. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she is taking to monitor standards in universities. [37291]

Mr. Forth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright).

Television and Video Violence

23. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans her Department has to carry out research into the possibility that behavioural changes in school children may be caused by the viewing of excessive television and video violence. [37292]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department has no plans to carry out research in this area.

Access to Work Scheme

24. **Ms Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she has taken to monitor the impact of the new employer contributions on support for disabled people through the access to work scheme. [37293]

Mr. Paice: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker).

Examination Results

25. **Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the 10 worst performing local authorities with regard to examination results, and place a full list in the Library. [37295]

Mr. Robin Squire: The 10 local education authority areas with the lowest percentage of 15-year-old pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE last year were Islington, Knowsley, Tower Hamlets, Southwark, Manchester, Lambeth, Newham, Hackney, Liverpool and Sandwell. A full list has been placed in the Library.

Jobcentres

27. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her policy with regard to the monitoring of the quality of jobs on offer in jobcentres. [37297]

Mr. Forth: A wide range of vacancies is notified to jobcentres and there is no single definition of quality which could be used for monitoring purposes. Jobcentres can refuse vacancies only where there are strong reasons for doing so, for example where the vacancy may put jobseekers at risk or there is evidence that the employer is not genuine.

Educational Structures (European Union)

28. Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she next plans to meet her European Union counterparts to discuss matters of mutual interest in secondary and higher educational structures. [37298]

Mr. Forth: I hope to meet my European Union counterparts at the next Education Council on 21 November 1996.

Training and Enterprise Councils

29. Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement about the criteria for funding training and enterprise councils. [37299]

Mr. Paice: The Department negotiates funding locally with training and enterprise councils for the activities in their business plan, according to the criteria set out in their contract with Government.

Graduates

32. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her projection of the number of *(a)* medical, *(b)* dental, *(c)* nursing and *(d)* veterinary students who will graduate in each of the next five academic years. [37303]

Mr. Forth: The Department has not published projections in precisely this form. The most recent projections were published in the Department's annual report in 1994 and covered the period to 1996–97. They showed, in figures rounded to the nearest thousand, a projection of 4,000 graduates in medicine and dentistry, combined, and 2,000 graduates in veterinary, agriculture and related subjects, combined in Britain for each year. Projections of the number of nurses who will graduate are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement about employment rates for new graduates. [39686]

Mr. Forth: I will write to my hon. Friend with the information requested and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Hearing Impaired People

33. **Mr. Berry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the proportion of people with hearing impairments reaching national educational and training targets. [37304]

Mrs Gillan: The proportion of people in the United Kingdom with a long-term hearing impairment which affects the kind of work that they can do who have reached the lifetime target 1 standard is 38 per cent. For the lifetime target 2 standard it is 16 per cent.

Disabled People (Employment Schemes)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has received about the performance of supported employment schemes for disabled people. [37302]

Mrs. Gillan: In the last three months representations have been made to the Secretary of State, and to my noble Friend the Minister of State, about the following supported employment programme issues:

the future for the Blindcraft supported workshop in Aber'een;

the number of Section 1 and Section 2 registered disabled people employed in Remploy factories; and

the level of grant-in-aid allocated to Remploy for 1996–97.

GCSE Passes

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each local education authority with more than 30 per cent. of secondary pupils in grant-maintained schools the percentage of 15-year-old pupils achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A to C in *(a)* grant-maintained and comprehensives and *(b)* local education authority comprehensives banded by the proportion of pupils taking or entitled to free school meals being (i) less than 5 per cent., (ii) 5 to 9 per cent., (iii) 10 to 19 per cent., (iv) 20 to 29 per cent., (v) 30 to 39 per cent. and (vi) more than 40 per cent., stating in each case how many schools contribute to the figures given. [38022]

Mr. Paice: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Bradford Breakthrough Ltd.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library a copy of the letter, dated 20 May from the chief executive of Bradford Breakthrough Ltd.,

addressed to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), and her reply. —[38095]

Mrs. Gillan: I have today placed in the Library a copy of the letter of 20 May 1996 from the chief executive of Bradford Breakthrough Ltd., and my reply of 12 June.

Physical Education

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school staff receive an extra pay allowance for responsibility in physical education or sport using the data collated in her Department's survey into physical education in schools. [38506]

Mrs. Gillan: Results of the survey of PE and sport in schools 1996 show that 2.1 per cent. of school staff in maintained primary schools in England are receiving an extra pay allowance for responsibility in physical education and/or sport. The equivalent figure for maintained secondary schools is 3 per cent.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list by gender the average percentage of pupils participating in extra-curricular sport in each of the school years 1 to 12 using the data collated in her Department's survey into physical education in schools. [38502]

Mrs. Gillan: The information is shown in the following table:

Average percentage of pupils in maintained primary and secondary schools in England participating in extra-curricular sport by year group and gender

Year group	*Boys*	*Girls*
1	3.6	3.0
2	6.7	5.1
3	20.0	16.5
4	27.6	23.3
5	43.4	38.2
6	47.6	42.1
7	42.2	36.7
8	40.9	35.4
9	38.3	31.4
10	32.9	24.9
11	28.9	20.8
12	18.9	11.6

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will list for each of the school years 1 to 12 the percentage of schools *(a)* timetabling two hours or less physical education in the school week, *(b)* devoting two hours or less to national curriculum physical education and *(c)* timetabling two hours or less to traditional sports using the data collected in her Department's survey into physical education in schools; [38509]

(2) if she will list for each of the school years 1 to 12 the percentage of schools *(a)* timetabling one hour or less physical education in the school week, *(b)* devoting one hour or less to national curriculum physical education and *(c)* timetabling one hour or less to traditional sports using the data collected in her Department's survey into physical education in schools; [38512]

(3) if she will list for each of school years 1 to 12 the percentage of schools *(a)* timetabling 90 minutes or less physical education in the school week, *(b)* devoting 90 minutes or less to national curriculum physical education and *(c)* timetabling 90 minutes or less to traditional sports using the data collated in her Department's survey in physical education in schools. [38510]

Mrs. Gillan: The available information is shown in the following tables:

Table 1: Time spent per week by maintained primary and secondary schools in England on national curriculum PE by year group

Year group:	*Percentage of schools*[1]											
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*	*12*
Two hours or less	88.4	88.0	81.3	78.6	70.7	72.0	57.4	64.3	74.5	89.9	91.5	94.4
90 minutes or less	63.5	61.1	48.2	43.0	33.6	33.8	8.0	11.2	20.0	61.2	60.3	76.1
60 minutes or less	21.0	19.9	12.4	10.1	7.5	7.3	1.3	2.7	4.4	29.8	30.1	50.0

[1] Total number of schools with the relevant year group doing 2 hours or less, 90 minutes or less and 60 minutes or less per week on national curriculum PE, expressed as a proportion of all schools with the relevant year group which responded to the question.

Table 2: Time spent per week by maintained primary and secondary schools in England on traditional sports by year group

Year group:	*Percentage of schools*[1]											
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*	*12*
Boys												
2 hours or less	98.0	97.3	96.2	95.2	92.9	94.6	95.7	96.0	96.1	96.8	97.3	97.8
90 minutes or less	95.6	94.0	90.4	88.7	83.3	84.4	71.9	73.5	78.3	87.3	87.2	92.2
60 minutes or less	90.0	87.4	77.0	73.5	61.8	61.1	35.1	36.6	42.1	62.2	67.7	76.7
Girls												
2 hours or less	98.2	97.5	96.2	95.2	92.9	94.6	95.5	96.1	96.5	97.1	97.7	98.9
90 minutes or less	95.7	94.2	90.3	88.4	83.3	84.4	74.5	77.9	82.4	90.5	91.0	95.5
60 minutes or less	90.2	87.5	76.9	73.3	61.8	61.1	38.3	41.6	48.0	68.3	72.8	79.9

[1] Total number of schools with the relevant year group doing 2 hours or less, 90 minutes or less and 60 minutes or less per week on traditional sports, expressed as a proportion of all schools with the relevant year group which responded to the question.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the average amount of physical education to the nearest minute for each of school years 1 to 12 *(a)* timetabled in the school week, *(b)* devoted to national curriculum physical education and *(c)* timetabled to traditional sports using the data collated in her Department's survey into physical education in schools. [38508]

Mrs. Gillan: The available information is shown in the following table:

Average time devoted to national curriculum physical education, and to traditional sports in maintained primary and secondary schools in England

Year group	Average minutes per week devoted to: National curriculum PE	Traditional sports	
		Boys	Girls
1	96	36	36
2	97	40	40
3	104	58	58
4	108	63	63
5	115	73	72
6	113	72	72
7	134	98	97
8	127	95	93
9	122	91	89
10	97	74	70
11	95	65	61
12	69	39	34

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average amount of time to the nearest minute that *(a)* primary school staff, *(b)* physical education staff in secondary schools, *(c)* non-physical education staff in secondary schools, *(d)* volunteers devote to extra-curricular sport using the data collated in her Department's survey into physical education in schools. [38504]

Mrs. Gillan: The available information is shown in the following table:

Average time devoted to extra-curricular sport per week in maintained primary and secondary schools in England

	Hours (to nearest half hour)
By all primary school staff	2.0
By secondary school PE teaching staff	18.5
By secondary school non-PE teaching staff	4.5
By volunteers	1.5

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list by gender the percentage of schools offering extra-curricular *(a)* football, *(b)* cricket, *(c)* hockey, *(d)* netball, *(e)* rugby, *(f)* tennis, *(g)* athletics and *(h)* swimming in each of the school years 1 to 12 using the data collated in her Department's survey into physical education in schools. [38507]

Mrs. Gillan: The available information is shown in the following tables:

Percentage of maintained primary and secondary schools in England offering extra-curricular sport by activity, gender and year group

Football

Percentage of schools

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
Primary–Boys	9.0	13.5	45.8	64.0	87.5	89.5	100.0
Primary–Girls	8.3	11.6	38.9	52.0	69.9	71.0	60.0

Percentage of schools

	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Secondary—Boys	88.9	87.3	88.5	88.1	88.3	87.7	86.3	64.5
Secondary—Girls	50.0	49.1	43.0	44.7	39.9	34.7	29.9	14.8

Cricket

Percentage of schools

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
Primary—Boys	3.1	3.5	16.4	24.3	45.5	48.3	80.0
Primary—Girls	2.8	3.3	14.9	20.5	36.1	39.3	46.7

Percentage of schools

	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Secondary—Boys	66.7	76.4	80.7	82.6	80.6	79.5	54.0	33.5
Secondary—Girls	27.8	34.5	18.0	16.4	12.6	10.4	8.5	3.0

Hockey

Percentage of schools

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
Primary—Boys	1.7	2.0	9.8	11.9	17.1	19.0	40.0
Primary—Girls	1.5	2.0	9.8	11.9	17.3	19.8	33.3

Percentage of schools

	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Secondary—Boys	22.2	27.3	37.5	40.7	42.6	42.3	37.5	28.1
Secondary—Girls	29.6	38.2	72.7	74.2	73.5	68.6	63.6	43.8

Netball

Percentage of schools

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
Primary—Boys	2.6	3.9	21.6	32.9	50.8	52.9	46.7
Primary—Girls	2.8	4.4	28.6	42.6	69.7	70.7	2.8

Percentage of schools

	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Secondary—Boys	18.5	20.0	10.4	8.7	7.4	7.1	6.0	1.5
Secondary—Girls	66.7	76.4	92.2	91.3	89.3	87.4	80.5	46.8

Rugby

Percentage of schools

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
Primary—Boys	0.9	1.1	8.0	9.7	17.6	20.5	33.3
Primary—Girls	0.9	0.9	6.9	8.6	15.7	18.0	26.7

Percentage of schools

	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Secondary—Boys	42.6	49.1	62.5	62.3	60.9	50.8	46.0	32.5
Secondary—Girls	16.7	21.8	7.3	8.2	7.7	7.4	6.6	3.0

Tennis

Percentage of schools

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
Primary—Boys	2.8	4.4	10.9	11.9	15.9	16.6	26.7
Primary—Girls	2.8	4.4	10.4	11.5	15.7	16.6	26.7

Percentage of schools

	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Secondary—Boys	38.9	43.6	55.2	59.6	62.6	60.1	49.0	32.0
Secondary—Girls	40.7	47.3	65.4	67.2	69.7	67.5	55.3	36.0

Athletics

Percentage of schools

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
Primary—Boys	7.2	8.5	30.2	38.1	49.4	50.2	60.0
Primary—Girls	6.8	8.1	30.4	38.1	49.9	50.5	60.0

Percentage of schools

	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Secondary—Boys	79.6	81.8	86.7	88.1	88.3	82.2	63.8	35.0
Secondary—Girls	74.1	78.2	90.1	90.8	90.4	83.9	66.8	32.5

Swimming

Percentage of schools

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
Primary—Boys	4.8	5.5	14.0	18.2	23.4	22.2	33.3
Primary—Girls	4.8	5.7	14.2	18.0	22.9	21.5	20.0

Percentage of schools

	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Secondary—Boys	35.2	20.0	27.3	25.8	26.2	26.0	24.7	18.7
Secondary—Girls	37.0	23.6	29.9	28.3	27.9	27.0	24.9	20.2

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of *(a)* secondary schools and *(b)* primary schools offer extra-curricular sport (i) every lunchtime and (ii) after school every day using the data collated in her Department's survey into physical education in schools. [38505]

Mrs. Gillan: The information is shown in the following table:

Percentage of maintained primary and secondary schools in England offering extra-curricular sport every lunch-time and every day after school

	Primary	*Secondary*
Every lunch-time	6.2	67.0
Every day after school	2.4	39.2

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools give swimming tuition at (i) a local swimming pool, (ii) an on-site pool used only by that school, (iii) an on-site pool used also for community provision and (iv) an on-site pool of a neighbouring school using the data collated in her Department's survey into physical education in schools. [38513]

Mrs. Gillan: The available information is shown in the following table:

Percentage of maintained primary and secondary schools in England providing swimming tuition

	Primary	*Secondary*
Percentage of schools providing swimming tuition	85.4	59.2
Of the schools providing swimming tuition the percentage giving tuition at[1]*:*		
A local swimming pool	77.5	51.6
On-site pool used only by that school	10.7	13.2
On-site pool also used for the community	4.2	29.2
On-site pool of a neighbour primary school	5.9	2.0
On-site pool of a neighbour secondary school	9.8	5.6
Other site	2.6	2.4

[1] Figures add up to more than 100 per cent. because some schools use more than one location.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* her policies and *(b)* the work of her Department in helping small businesses in the last 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if she will publish the performance indicators by which her Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39142]

Mr. Paice: I will write to my hon. Friend with the information requested and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Free School Meals, North Yorkshire

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what percentage of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school children in North Yorkshire received free school meals in each year since 1979. [38928]

Mrs. Gillan: The available information is shown in the following table. Comparable information prior to 1989 is not available, but figures from earlier school meals censuses were published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in its "School Meal Statistics" volumes, copies of which are available in the Library.

Day-pupils taking free school meals in maintained primary and secondary schools in North Yorkshire Local Education Authority area: 1989–1995

Position in January each year

	Primary		*Secondary*	
	Pupils	*Percentage*[1]	*Pupils*	*Percentage*[1]
1989	3,403	6	1,880	4
1990	3,566	6	1,642	4
1991	4,033	7	1,682	4
1992	4,938	9	1,987	5
1993	5,513	9	2,288	5
1994	6,073	10	2,591	6
1995	6,336	10	2,803	6

[1] The number of day pupils who took a free meal on the census day expressed as a percentage of the number of day pupils on roll.

Skill Centres (Sales)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which skill centres formerly belonging to the skills training agency have now been sold; what is the total amount so far received from the sales; and what has been the expenditure since 1993 on the administration of the sales. [39066]

Mr. Paice: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her Department's budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media. [39352]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department has no budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many staff are assumed in her Department's budget employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, *(a)* to work on press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39340]

Mr. Squire: The number of departmental staff allocated for this purpose in 1996–97 is as follows:

(a) Press and media

(i) Full-time 21

(ii) Part-time 2

(b) Information and publicity

(i) Full-time 46

(ii) Part-time 6

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many staff were employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94. [39416]

Mr. Squire: The Department for Education and Employment was formed in July 1995, following the merger of the Department for Education and the Employment Department. With regard to information and publicity and press and media work, the merged Department was treated for accounting purposes as separate units throughout 1995–96.

The number of staff employed, full time or part time, in the two former departments was as follows:

	Information and publicity	*Press and media*
Department for Education		
1993–94	16	11
1994–95	17.5	13
1995–96	16	13
Employment Department		
1993–94	37	12.5
1994–95	35	12.5
1995–96	34.5	10

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the cost budgeted for staff, employed full time or part time, to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39441]

Mr. Squire: The cost budgeted by the Department for staff, full time and part time, to provide information and publicity in 1996–97 is £1,341,000.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the cost of staff employed full time or part time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work on the press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94. [39435]

Mr. Squire: The Department for Education and Employment was formed in July 1995, following the merger of the Department for Education and the Employment Department. With regard to information and publicity and press and media work, the merged Department was treated for accounting purposes as separate units throughout 1995–96.

The cost of staff employed, full time and part time, in the two former departments is shown in the table.

£ thousand

	Information and publicity	*Press and media*
Department for Education		
1993–94	400	363
1994–95	544	439
1995–96	551	442
Employment Department		
1993–94	830	276
1994–95	891	319
1995–96	864	267

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the cost, assumed in the budget, of people employed full time or part time to work on the press and the media in 1996–97. [39986]

Mr. Squire: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Secondary Modern Schools

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to reintroduce secondary modern schools in areas currently served by comprehensive schools. [37728]

Mrs. Gillan: None.

Back-to-Work Schemes

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many people participated in work trials during 1995–96; and how many of these subsequently *(a)* obtained employment, *(b)* signed on as unemployed and *(c)* claimed an incapacity benefit; [39097]

(2) how many employers were contracted with the Employment Service to run work trials during 1995–96. [39098]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Robert Horne to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked Mike Fogden to reply to your questions about the operation of Work Trials. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to him as Chief Executive of the Agency. I am answering in his absence as Finance Director of the Agency.

During the 1995/96 operational year 29,434 people participated in a Work Trial. Of these, 17,416 obtained employment following the trial. Work Trial participants remain registered unemployed and in receipt of benefit during their trial; participants whose trials do not lead to employment may consequently continue to be unemployed. Information is not collected about people participating in Work Trials whilst on an incapacity benefit.

We do not collect information on the number of individual employers participating in Work Trials.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many unemployed people have taken part in workstart schemes; and what assessment she has made of their effectiveness. [39101]

Mr. Forth: Various workstart schemes have been piloted during the last three years. In total, almost 2,900 people have been placed into work. Assessment of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of workstart is getting very long-term unemployed people into work is continuing.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the estimated cost to her Department of running *(a)* the work trials scheme, *(b)* the jobmatch scheme and *(c)* workstart. [39099]

Mr. Forth: In this financial year, £6,435,000 has been allocated for running work trials, £5,104,000 for jobmatch and £2,350,000 for workstart. This includes expenditure by both the Employment Service, and the training and enterprise councils involved in the jobmatch pilots.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people participated in the jobmatch schemes during 1995–96; what was the average amount payable to each participant; and how many participants subsequently *(a)* obtained employment, *(b)* signed on as unemployed or *(c)* claimed an incapacity benefit. [39100]

Mr. Forth: Between April 1995 and March 1996, 3,361 people started the jobmatch programme. The estimated average amount paid to participants in allowances during this period was around £1,200. Jobmatch participants are in employment. Information is not yet available on the employment status of participants after the jobmatch allowance ceases. A follow-up survey of people who started jobmatch during 1995–96 is being conducted.

Castle Hall School, Mirfield

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what legal advice she has received on the consultation process following the application by Castle Hall grant-maintained schools' Mirfield to admit pupils over the age of 16 years. [39319]

Mr. Paice: I wrote on 18 July to the head teacher in reply to his letter regarding the status of their application. As a result of legal advice I informed him that the application could not be considered due to inadequate consultation. I therefore invited the governors to withdraw their proposals and resubmit them in compliance with the regulations. The governors have now written withdrawing their proposals.

Departmental Vehicles (Traffic Violations)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the number of traffic violations involving departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39310]

Mr. Robin Squire: The driver is responsible for any fines and penalties incurred while driving a DFEE vehicle. Not all traffic violations are notified to the Department. Where violations have been notified, details are kept on vehicle specific files and no central records are maintained.

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in her name, or that of other Ministers in her Department, for meetings with Conservative hon. Members immediately preceding questions to her Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39520]

Mr. Robin Squire: Ministers have meetings with honourable Members as and when necessary to discuss a wide variety of matters. Records are not kept which would enable the distinction on the type of meeting to be drawn.

Asthma

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many school days were lost by children as a result of asthma in the last year for which figures are available. [39558]

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not collected centrally. Information on levels of authorised and unauthorised absence is collected annually in respect of all day pupils of compulsory school age, but schools are not required to break their authorised absence totals down by cause of absence.

Schools Renewal Challenge Fund

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will publish her decisions regarding the bids entered by local education authorities for the schools renewal challenge fund. [39784]

Mrs. Gillan: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Schools Pupils (London)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Eduation and Employment if she will list, by local authority, the number of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school pupils resident in London boroughs and the City of London, who attend schools in local authorities other than the one they live in; for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [39626]

Mr. Robin Squire: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Degree Courses

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will discourage universities from providing degree courses in vocational disciplines where job opportunities are limited. [39687]

Mr. Forth: I will write to my hon. Friend with the information requested and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will state the proportion of their budgets which each training and enterprise council spent on small firms last year. [39851]

Mr. Paice: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Professors (Medicine)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many professors there are *(a)* of general practice, *(b)* related to hospital specialties and *(c)* in total in medical schools. [39824]

Mr. Forth: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Universities (Career Guidance)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will take measures to improve career guidance provided at or by universities. [39688]

Mr. Forth: I will write to my hon. Friend with the information requested and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Technology Colleges

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list, by parliamentary constituency, those schools which have been awarded technology college status in the last two bidding rounds. [39657]

Mrs. Gillan: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many visits (i) she and (ii) her Ministers made to *(a)* the Newbury constituency and *(b)* other constituencies in the last 12 months. [39871]

Mr. Robin Squire: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Employment Code of Practice

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she proposes to publish the employment code of practice under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if she will make a statement. [40008]

Mr. Paice: We will be publishing the employment code of practice tomorrow and a copy will be placed in the Library.

The code of practice, which has now been approved by Parliament, will come into force on 2 December, the same day that the employment provisions will be commenced. The code gives practical guidance through a wide range of examples to illustrate how employers and others can comply with the employment provisions, although the action required in any given situation will depend on the particular circumstances. By publishing the code now we are giving employers, and others affected by the employment provisions time to familiarise themselves with its guidance and take whatever action they wish in order to prepare for implementation of the new duties and rights.

As well as the printed version, the code will also be available in braille and on audio cassette tape. All formats will be available through Her Majesty's Stationery Office outlets.

Higher Education (Inquiry Evidence)

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library the Government's evidence to the national committee of inquiry into higher education. [40002]

Mr. Forth: Yes. Copies of papers submitted so far to the committee have been placed in the Library.

European Movement

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what financial assistance the European Movement has given to *(a)* the Liberal European Action Group, *(b)* the Labour Committee for Europe, *(c)* the Conservative Group for Europe, *(d)* the Association for a Social Democratic Europe, *(e)* trade union activities and *(f)* the Youth Group for Europe in the last 10 years. [40077]

Mr. Forth: The matters raised by my hon. Friend are not the responsibility of the Department.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the recent representations made to her about capital funding of higher education and the role of the PFI. [37288]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations about capital funding in higher education and the role of the PFI. She has set up two working groups to consider the issues, and they are expected to report soon.

Statistical Forms

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the statistical forms issued to businesses by her Department, indicating the number of each sent out. [38680]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* The information requested is shown in the following table:

Name or purpose of form	*Number issued*
A. Forms completed by training providers[1]	
TfW2 (Training for Work)	Approximately 500,000
YT2 (Youth Training)	Approximately 500,000
MA1 (Modern Apprenticeships)	Approximately 500,000
B. Forms completed by independent schools[2]	
Annual schools' census	Approximately 2,250
Annual survey of absences	[3]see below
Annual survey of assisted places	Approximately 300
Annual survey of examination results in the assisted places scheme	Approximately 300

[1] These forms are completed in part by trainees and in part by training providers, some of which are businesses. The information obtained is used for both statistical and financial control purposes.

[2] For purposes of deregulation the Department regards independent schools as businesses. Some of the information obtained from independent schools is used for both statistical and administrative purposes.

[3] Completed by all schools, including independent schools, with day pupils of compulsory school age.

Training Schemes (North Yorkshire)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of people leaving Government supported training schools in North Yorkshire between September 1994 and August 1995 obtained a full-time job in a field closely related to that in which they received training. [38936]

Mr. Paice: I will write to the hon. Member with the information and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the last 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39152]

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the last 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39154]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Government recognise the crucial role played by small firms in the United Kingdom economy and aim to help them by providing sound economic conditions—keeping inflation and interest rates low; reducing legislative administration and taxation burdens; and where appropriate provide direct assistance in the form of specialist advice and support and easing access to finance.

The Office of Public Service is responsible for taking forward the competitiveness agenda across Government, promoting deregulation and promoting best practice in all aspects of the Government's relationship with the private sector. Helping small business is a key part of these activities. The third competitiveness White Paper, "Creating the enterprise centre of Europe", provides a summary of these activities. A copy of the document is available in the House of Commons Library.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many staff were employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94; [39426]

(2) what is the cost budgeted for staff, employed full time or part time, to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39452]

(3) what is his Department's budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media; [39343]

(4) what was the cost of staff employed full time or part time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work on the press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94; [39404]

(5) how many staff are assumed in his Department's budget, employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, *(a)* to work on press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39470]

(6) what is the cost, assumed in the budget, of people employed full time or part time to work on the press and the media in 1996–97. [39987]

Mr. Willetts: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore be writing to the hon. Member and will place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Millennium Exhibition

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will name the members and terms of reference of the exhibition committee of the Millennium Commission chaired by Robert Ayling Esq. and the financial resources now available to it to fulfil its remit; [39915]

(2) pursuant to his oral answer of 22 July, *Official Report*, column 6, concerning the millennium exhibition if he will list the financial commitment made by each of the institutions. [39946]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore be writing to the hon. Member and will place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Departmental Vehicles (Traffic Violations)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the number of traffic violations involving departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39315]

Mr. Freeman: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore be writing to the hon. Member and will place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Ministerial Car Fleet

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the number of traffic violations involving cars of the ministerial fleet, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39297]

Mr. Freeman: Responsibility for the subject of this question has been delegated under the terms of the framework document to the Security Facilities Executive. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. John King, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from J. C. King to Ms Glenda Jackson, dated 23 July 1996:

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to respond to your Questions about the Government Car Service (GCS). As Chief Executive of the Security Facilities Executive, I have operational responsibility for the GCS.

GCS Drivers are responsible for driving safely and responsibly. With the exception of parking offences, they meet the cost of any fines for motoring offences from their own pockets, and we do not keep details.

Our records show that the Government Car Service covered the cost of the following parking violations from 1986:

Year	*Total*	*Total cost (£)*
1986	282	2,820
1987	98	1,116
1988	238	2,856
1989	90	1,080
1990	125	1,500
1991	37	666
1992	43	1.075
1993	33	990
1994	17	510
1995	35	1,050
1996 (to date)	8	240

These costs cover the whole of the Government Car Service, including the Ministerial vehicles. It would, however, be disproportionately costly to disaggregate this information by customer.

Civil Servants (Secondments)

Ms Quin: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many civil servants have been seconded to the European Commission and to which directorates in each of the last five years. [38690]

Mr. Freeman: For the past five years around 100 United Kingdom and Northern Ireland civil servants have been on secondment to the European Commission as national experts at any given time. The total number of secondees in post at the end of each of the last four years, together with the current figures, broken down by directorates general, are as follows:

Detached national experts

	As at 31 December 1992	*As at 31 December 1993*	*As at 31 December 1994*	*As at 31 December 1995*	*As at 22 July 1996*
DGI	11	13	15	8	6
DGIA	—	—	1	3	5
DGIB	—	—	—	—	2
DGII	2	1	2	1	1
DGIII	11	10	10	6	7
DGIV	5	5	5	4	4
DGV	17	12	4	8	8
DGVI	15	15	11	8	4
DGVII	2	1	5	4	4
DGVIII	1	2	3	4	6
DGIX	2	2	1	2	1
DGX	0	1	1	1	0
DGXI	10	11	12	15	14
DGXII	3	3	4	4	5
DGXIII	2	2	1	1	1
DGXIV	1	1	1	0	0
DGXV	1	3	5	6	4
DGXVI	7	5	5	4	4
DGXVII	1	1	1	1	1
DGXVIII	0	0	0	0	0
DGXIX	1	1	1	0	1
DGXX	1	1	1	1	1
DGXXI	4	8	3	7	7
DGXXII	2	0	2	3	2
DGXXIII	2	3	1	0	0
DGXXIV	—	—	—	—	0
Sec General	2	4	2	2	4

Detached national experts

	As at 31 December 1992	*As at 31 December 1993*	*As at 31 December 1994*	*As at 31 December 1995*	*As at 22 July 1996*
Legal Service	2	2	3	1	1
Eurostat	4	8	9	8	8
Cabinet	0	0	0	1	1
Total	109	115	109	103	102

HMSO

Mr. Miller: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister who will hold archives of parliamentary papers *(a)* in paper form and *(b)* in electronic form, currently held by HMSO following the proposed privatisation; and what estimate he has made of their value. [39624]

Mr. Freeman: The national archive of parliamentary papers in paper form is held by the British Library and not HMSO. This archive will be unaffected by the privatisation. HMSO's own archive of parliamentary papers is held as a mixture of paper and microfilm. It is extensive but not comprehensive. HMSO has only a limited archive of material in electronic formats.

The draft contract between the House and the privatised stationery office sets out the periods for which the *Official Report* and other papers must be kept in print by the stationery office.

No valuation of this material has been made.

Central Office of Information

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what performance targets he has set for the Central Office of Information for the current year. [39939]

Mr. Freeman: My primary objective for the Central Office of Information is to complete the implementation of changes announced on 23 November last year that will refocus the work of the agency and increase its efficiency.

The key performance targets for COI in 1996–97 will be:

Financial

To break even before exceptional items in modified historical cost terms, after recovering all costs, including interest on borrowings.

Efficiency

To achieve a 3 per cent. reduction in unit cost of output in real terms, before exceptional costs, while maintaining suitable levels of quality.

Quality

To equal or better the proportion of work delivered in accordance with specification during 1995–96.

To equal or better the proportion of work delivered on time during 1995–96.

To achieve an average score of 8.2 out of 10 for the COI customer satisfaction index.

Security Facilities Executive

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has set the performance targets for the Security Facilities Executive; and if he will make a statement. [39940]

Mr. Freeman: I have set the following performance targets for SAFE for the financial year 1996–97. I recognise that the income and expenditure of the agency will be affected by the proposed sale of the custody service in early 1997. I will take this into account in due course.

Financial

Achieve:

100 per cent. full cost recovery in accruals terms including 6 per cent. cost of capital but excluding restructuring costs

91 per cent. full recovery in accruals terms including 6 per cent. cost of capital and restructuring costs

The 100 per cent. full cost recovery target was achieved for 1995–96.

Produce a surplus of £1 million (excluding restructuring costs). This target was not achieved in 1995–96.

Sales

Achieve a sales turnover of £40 million. This target was achieved in 1995–96.

Efficiency

Achieve no less than 4 per cent. efficiency gain in running costs.

Quality of Service

Achieve a weighted 91 per cent. satisfaction rating in customer satisfaction surveys. The target of 90 per cent. was achieved in 1995–96.

Achieve for GCS and IDS operations and maintain for all other businesses the standards of ISO 9000 on quality management systems. This target was achieved for GCS/IDS workshop, custody services and special services group in 1995–96.

Prepare statement of intent and begin programme leading to Investors in People accreditation in 1998. This is a new target.

Environment

Achieve an annual average of 25.5 miles per gallon for the GCS/IDS fleet. The target—of 25 miles per gallon—was achieved in 1995–96.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Bowbelle

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects to make a decision on whether to prosecute the master of the Bowbelle. [39455]

The Attorney-General: I refer to the written answer which I gave yesterday to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), *Official Report*, column *206*.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Attorney-General when the Crown Prosecution Service received the transcripts of the evidence given at the inquest which followed the sinking of the Marchioness; what factors have prevented a decision being taken on whether to initiate a prosecution; when such a decision is expected; and if he will make a statement. [39017]

The Attorney-General: The transcripts became available in stages, the final instalment have being received on Friday 15 December 1995. The Crown Prosecution Service has sought the advice of senior counsel. The matter is complex but the Director of Public Prosecutions expects to issue her decision very shortly.

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Attorney-General on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in his name, or that of the Solicitor-General, for meetings with Conservative Members immediately preceding questions to his Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39525]

The Attorney-General: None.

Departmental Vehicles (Traffic Violations)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the number of traffic violations involving Departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39314]

The Solicitor-General: The following information relates to vehicles operated by the Crown Prosecution Service under arrangements which began in 1991. It does not include vehicles provided to the Law Officers' departments by the Government car service:

Year	*Number of violations*	*Nature*	*Total fines (£)*
1991	1	Parking offence	16
1992	4	Parking offences	135
1993	2	Parking offences	90
1994	5	Parking offences	300
1995	3	Parking offences	80
	1	Failure to comply with traffic lights	nil

Crown Prosecutors

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Attorney-General what guidance the Director of Public Prosecutions has issued to Crown prosecutors on the application for the code of Crown prosecutors. [40012]

The Attorney-General: An explanatory memorandum was issued to all Crown prosecutors in June 1994, giving guidance on how the code for Crown prosecutors should be applied in individual cases. That explanatory memorandum has recently been revised and will shortly be provided to all Crown prosecutors. Copies will also be made available to other prosecuting authorities, the police and other interested agencies.

The revisions focus on the evidential sufficiency test and amount to a shift in emphasis in three principal ways. First, Crown prosecutors are encouraged to try to secure further evidence when they do not think there is sufficient to prosecute and, in cases of doubt, to ask themselves whether there is no realistic prospect of conviction rather than conclude that the case is too evenly balanced to prosecute. Secondly, Crown prosecutors are urged to focus their attention only on specific identifiable lines of defence which the prosecution must seek to overcome from the outset, and to ignore speculative defences.

Thirdly, guidance is given on the distinction between those cases that are evidentially complex or difficult and those that are simply weak. Confusing the two types of case may cause some prosecutors to conclude that there is not a realistic prospect of conviction, when a more experienced prosecutor would explore and find ways of overcoming what are difficulties, rather than inherent weaknesses. The guidance should increase the ability of Crown prosecutors to identify and then overcome what might otherwise be perceived as insuperable obstacles to a successful prosecution.

The revised explanatory memorandum is being printed and copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses as soon as they are available.

ISC-Ferranti

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Attorney-General on what date the offices of ISC in West London were sealed by agents of Her Majesty's Government. [36698]

The Attorney-General *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* The offices of ISC in west London were never sealed by officials of the Serious Fraud Office or by the police who worked in conjunction with them.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Attorney-General when his office was advised of evidence of fraud related to ISC-Ferranti committed within the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom; and what subsequent action was taken. [36696]

The Attorney-General *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* In September 1989 the Serious Fraud Office commenced an investigation into suspected fraud relating to ISC-Ferranti, and my office was informed. The investigation was carried out in close co-operation with the United States prosecuting authorities, because they had already commenced a separate investigation and it was apparent that all the potential defendants were United States citizens residing in the United States.

At the conclusion of the investigation, 17 individuals and three corporations were indicted in the United States on charges of fraud.

In December 1991, James Guerin, the former deputy chairman of Ferranti International Signals plc—the company which resulted from the merger of Ferranti and ISC in 1987—pleaded guilty before the federal court in Philadelphia to offences involving fraud in respect of the merged company, committed both in the United Kingdom and in the USA. All offences which might have been the subject of a United Kingdom trial were encompassed in the US indictment, and thus no proceedings were taken in the United Kingdom. James Guerin was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list each instance in which he exercised the power of the nolle prosegui in relation to the collapse of ISC-Ferranti. [36697]

The Attorney-General *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* No nolle prosequi was issued in relation to the collapse of ISC-Ferranti. James Guerin, the former deputy chairman of Ferranti International Signals plc, and Robert Shireman, former financial director of ISC (Technologies) Ltd., who had entered into plea agreements with the United States Attorney were granted limited immunity from prosecution by the then director of the Serious Fraud Office. The Serious Fraud Office undertook, in return for their co-operation with the investigation, not to prosecute Mr. Guerin and Mr. Shireman here for any offence in respect of which they were to be prosecuted in the United States. Mr. Geurin was subsequently sentenced to the United States to 15 years' imprisonment.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Attorney-General when his office was advised that there was evidence of fraud related to the merger of ISC and Ferranti; and which agency or agencies so advised. [36695]

The Attorney-General *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* My office was first advised on the inquiry by the Serious Fraud Office in September 1989, and was thereafter kept informed of the progress of the inquiry.

PRIME MINISTER

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Prime Minister how many staff are assumed in his Department's budget to be employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, *(a)* to work on press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39473]

The Prime Minister: Ten people are employed in press, media, information and publicity.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Prime Minister how many staff were employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94. [39413]

The Prime Minister: Ten people were employed, on a full-time basis, to work in information publicity press and media, in each of the years 1995–96, 1994–95 and 1993–94.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Prime Minister what was the cost of staff employed full time or part time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work on the press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94. [39437]

The Prime Minister: The cost for staff employed in the No. 10 press office for each year since 1993–94 is as follows:

1993–94: £450,000

1994–95: £450,000

1995–96: £480,000

Ms Hodge: To ask the Prime Minister what is the cost budgeted for staff employed full time or part time to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39439]

The Prime Minister: The expenditure on staff in the No. 10 press office in 1995–96 was £480,00. The outturn expenditure in 1996–97 will be published after the end of the financial year.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Prime Minister what is the cost assumed in the budget of people employed full time or part time to work on the press and the media in 1996–97. [39991]

The Prime Minister: The expenditure on staff in the No. 10 press office in 1995–96 was £480,000. The outturn expenditure in 1996–97 will be published after the end of the financial year.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Prime Minister what is his Department's budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media. [39355]

The Prime Minister: My office does not use consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media.

Honours Awards (Health Service)

Ms Harman: To ask the Prime Minister what percentage of honours awarded in each of the last five years were awarded to people working in the health service. [39765]

The Prime Minister: The percentages are as follows:

Year	*Percentage*
1992	7.1
1993	6.1
1994	6.5
1995	6.1
1996	6.1

Independent Tribunal Service

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Prime Minister which Government Department is responsible for the operation of the independent tribunal service. [39629]

The Prime Minister: The independent tribunal service is an independent statutory body, sponsored by the Department of Social Security. The President is responsible for its operation. He and its full and part-time chairmen are appointed by the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Ministers' Pay

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Prime Minister how many Ministers *(a)* will be and *(b)* will not be accepting the pay increases recommended by the senior salaries review body and approved by the House. [39675]

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Prime Minister how many Ministers *(a)* will be and *(b)* will not be accepting the pay increases recommended by the senior salaries review body and approved by the House. [40015]

The Prime Minister: These are private matters for the individuals concerned.

European Movement

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Prime Minister what financial assistance the Government made to the European Movement in 1985; and what plans he has to offer financial assistance in future years. [40078]

The Prime Minister: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Government Statistics

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will make it his policy to require Ministers within his Government to read and initial answers to parliamentary questions which relate directly to the work of their Departments when those answers are prepared by the Chancellor of the Exchequer following his assumption of responsibility for the preparation of Government statistics; and if he will make a statement; [37742]

(2) what specific steps he has taken to ensure that individual Ministers within his Government are made aware of each of the answers being given to parliamentary questions relating directly to the work of their Department in those cases where the answers to those questions are givne by the Chancellor of the Exchequer following his assumption of responsibility for the preparation of Government statistics; what steps he is taking to ensure that those Ministers are required to record their awareness of such questions on each occasion upon which they arise; and if he will make a statement; [37741]

(3) what public policy objectives are served by having the Chancellor of the Exchequer respond to written parliamentary questions dealing with abortion statistics; [37745]

(4) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the handling by the Chancellor of the Exchequer of Government statistics relating to the work of other Government Departments is consistent with the enhancement of the constitutional role of the House in scrutinising the actions of the Executive; [37743]

(5) what consultation he had with right hon. and hon. Members prior to the decision that questions in respect of certain Government statistics were to be handled in future by the Chancellor of the Exchequer rather than by the Minister to whose actions and policies they refer. [37744]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* The arrangements for answering parliamentary questions relating to the work of the Office for National Statistics have been reviewed, the aim being to enhance the accountability of Ministers to Parliament for the policies for which they are responsible and to emphasise that the statistics themselves are the responsibility of the director of the ONS, thereby improving public confidence in them.

With effect from the start of the 1996–97 Session the following procedures will apply:

all oral questions, and written questions which have some policy aspect, will be answered by the relevant Minister in whichever Department has responsibility for the subject concerned;

written questions simply seeking statistics that are the responsibility of the director of the ONS, will be delegated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the director of the ONS for answer, which will also be printed in the *Official Report*; and

the director of the ONS will routinely copy his answers to whichever Ministers he considers may have an interest.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Pay and Allowances

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is his estimate of the annual saving to public funds *(a)* gross and *(b)* net arising from the reduction of the top rate of car mileage allowance for hon. Members from 74.1p per mile to 47.2p per mile. [37848]

Mr. Newton: The single rate of car mileage allowance, 47.2p per mile for the first 20,000 miles and 21.7p thereafter, will come into effect from 1 April 1997, uprated by the percentage increase, if any, by which the retail prices index for March 1997 has increased compared with March 1996. The supply estimate for the Members vote for the financial year 1997–98, the first year of the single mileage rate, has not yet been compiled. I have therefore taken the year 1995–96, the most recent complete year for which data are available, as the base upon which to estimate an order of savings. On that basis I would anticipate an annual overall saving of around £2 million. It is not possible at this stage to calculate net savings.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is the annual cost to public funds, gross and net, arising from the increase in the salary rate of hon. Members to £43,000. [37849]

Mr. Newton: The estimated annual cost to public funds arising from the increase in the salary rate of hon. Members from £34,000 to £43,000 is £7.6 million. The cost in 1996–97 is estimated to be £5.7 million.

Ministers

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many hon. Members who were elected at each of the 1966, 1970 and 1979 general elections have been at some time Ministers in the Government, in receipt of ministerial salaries; and in each case what percentage of the total membership of the House this constituted. [37893]

Mr. Newton: I regret that this information could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

EU Memoranda

Sir John Cope: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many explanatory memoranda on European Union matters have been submitted to Parliament by Ministers in each of the last three years. [38807]

Mr. Newton: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost. However, the table gives the numbers of European Community documents deposited in Parliament in the last three years for consideration by the House of Commons Select Committee on European Legislation and the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities. Explanatory memoranda will have been produced on all but a small number of these documents and many will also have been the subject of supplementary memoranda updating Parliament on developments in negotiations or answering specific questions raised by either Select Committee. In addition, unnumbered explanatory memoranda are sometimes submitted to Parliament when a formal Community document is not available.

European Community documents deposited in Parliament

Year	*Documents*
1993	732
1994	769
1995	727

Water Consumption

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee (1) what steps have been taken to promote water efficiency in phase 2 of the new parliamentary building; what will be the capacity of lavatory cisterns in the new building; and what is the projected average daily water use per regular occupant of the building; [39884]

(2) what were the figures for overall water consumption on the parliamentary estate over the last five years; what are the figures for average daily water use per regular occupant of the estate; what water conservation devices are in place on the estate; and what plans there are *(a)* to improve the efficiency of and *(b)* to reduce water use; [39885]

(3) what steps have been taken to investigate the feasibility, costs and benefits of *(a)* reducing the flush volume of lavatories and *(b)* fitting automatic timers to urinal flushing systems on the parliamentary estate; [39886]

(4) what is the estimated annual volume of water use on lawns, plants and flowers on the parliamentary estate; and what studies have been made of the potential for using trickle or drop feed irrigation for such watering; [39887]

(5) what steps have been taken to investigate the feasibility, costs and benefits of fitting spray taps to basins on the parliamentary estate. [39888]

Sir Raymond Powell: I will ask the Director of Parliamentary Works to write to the hon. Member.

President Mandela (Brass Plaque)

Mr. Miller: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what plans he has to instal a brass plaque on the steps of Westminster Hall to commemorate the visit of President Mandela. [39731]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I have seen my hon. Friend's early-day motion 1155 on President Mandela's speech in Westminster Hall which I note has attracted the support of hon. Members from many of the parties represented in the House.

The final decision on whether such a plaque should be installed is, of course, a matter for the authorities controlling Westminster Hall. I propose to put the matter

before the Administration Committee at its first meeting in the new Session, with a view to formulating a possible recommendation to Madam Speaker.

Members' Pay Increase

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many hon. Members have informed the Fees Office that they will be approving payment to a charity of the whole or part of the increases payable on the decisions taken by the House on 10 July. [39673]

Mr. Newton: I am advised by the Fees Office that five "Give As You Earn" amendment forms have been issued since 10 July, but I am unable to say whether these forms have been requested as a result of the decision of the House that day.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list each occasion in the last two months in which his Department has consulted farmers directly about policy development concerning BSE and the beef crisis; and if he will make a statement. [37362]

Mr. Ancram: My noble Friend Baroness Denton will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Banned Feed

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how his Department plans to enforce legislation making it illegal for farmers to have outstanding stocks of banned feed on their premises; when that legislation comes into force; and if he will make a statement. [37355]

Mr. Ancram: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, on 19 July, *Official Report* column *699*.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many RUC officers arrived by helicopter in a field adjacent to Stonebridge roundabout, Rickhill on 9 July at approximately 1500 hours; how many of these officers had their services number openly displayed on their uniforms; how many plastic bullets were fired at the crowd at the roundabout; what warning was giving by the RUC offices that they intended to fire plastic bullets; what factors underlay the decision to use plastic bullets; if the principle of the use of minimum force was applied; and if he will make a statement. [373790]

Sir John Wheeler: Operational matters are issues for the Chief Constable of the RUC. However, plastic bullets are not in use in Northern Ireland.

In general terms, during the very grave incidents of the 10-day period between 7 and 16 July the RUC undertook many security duties which put them in danger. At different times it became necessary to use plastic baton rounds against identified targets actively involved in attacking police officers.

Demonstration (Comber)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons he estimates were involved in a protest at Bridge street, Comber on 10 July; if he will list the recorded incidents of attacks on *(a)* people and *(b)* property; how many Royal Ulster Constabulary officers arrived at the location by 2300 hours; what warnings the RUC issued to the protesters; what factors underlay the decisions of the RUC to use batons against protesters; and if he will make a statement. [37890]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the right hon. Gentleman.

Medical Equipment

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the adequacy of arrangements for replacing X-ray and nuclear medicine equipment in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the provision of such equipment. [38228]

Mr. Moss: The replacement of X-ray and nuclear equipment in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of health service providers. Annual allocations of general capital made to these providers enables them to set their own local priorities and make any arrangements for the replacement of equipment including X-ray and nuclear medical.

Since October 1991 the contracting and purchase of diagnostic imaging equipment have been arranged centrally through the regional supplies service. The effectiveness of these procedures is demonstrated by the substantial discounts in excess of 20 per cent. which have been achieved since their introduction. Increasingly in the future I will be looking to the private finance initiative to help tackle some of the problems in equipment replacement.

Anglo-Irish Secretariat

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary visited the Anglo-Irish secretariat at Maryfield, Belfast between 1 June and 6 July; and if he will make a statement on discussions between RUC officers and members of the Anglo-Irish secretariat. [38920]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the right hon. Gentleman.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the cost budgeted for staff employed full time or part time to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39449]

(2) what is his Department's budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media; [39342]

(3) how many staff are assumed in his Department's budget, employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, *(a)* to work on press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39384]

(4) how many staff were employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94; [39424]

(5) what was the cost of staff employed full time or part time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work on the press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94; [39406]

(6) what is the cost, assumed in the budget, of people employed full time or part time to work on the press and the media in 1996–97. [39978]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Drugs

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women, convicted by courts, of drug offences in Northern Ireland during 1995. [39222]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in his name, or that of other Ministers in his Department, for meetings with Conservative Members immediately preceding questions to his Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39527]

Sir John Wheeler: None.

Departmental Vehicles (Traffic Violations)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of traffic violations involving departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39303]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Northern Ireland Forum

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members of the Northern Ireland Forum have submitted their resignations; and if he will make a statement. [39330]

Mr. Ancram: I will write to the right hon. Gentleman.

Housing Benefit (Abbeyfield Society)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received from the Abbeyfield Society regarding recent changes in housing benefit. [39592]

Mr. Moss: I have received six letters from elected representatives on behalf of the Abbeyfield Society.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed changes to housing benefit on residents of Abbeyfield homes with particular reference to the increases in fees for residents; and if he will make a statement. [39593]

Mr. Moss: The Government have carefully considered all representations on this matter and have concluded that the sudden removal of this source of income may cause significant difficulties for many vulnerable people in supported accommodation.

On 8 July my right hon. and learned Friend withdrew the proposed draft regulations and has commissioned a review of the arrangements for funding supported accommodation.

No decision to proceed with the proposed legislation will be taken in Great Britain or Northern Ireland until the Government have considered the findings of the review and taken account of all matters raised by interested organisations.

School Transport

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to abolish the three-for-two rule on Ulsterbus buses used for the transport of school children. [39597]

Mr. Moss: There are no plans to abolish the rule. However, under the Public Service Vehicle (Conditions of Fitness, Equipment and Use) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995, which came into operation on 24 January of this year, the three-for-two concession for buses no longer applies where seat belts are fitted.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to ensure that Ulsterbus is paid by the education and library boards only for passes which are used; and what plans he has to ensure that Ulsterbus is paid for each journey undertaken by schoolchildren with passes. [39598]

Mr. Ancram: The current contractual arrangements whereby boards pay to Ulsterbus Ltd. an average sessional ticket price for pupils incorporates a reduction in the actual cost to reflect non usage. There are no plans to alter these arrangements.

Training Schools

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how much Government funding has been provided in total to Rathgael training centre in each of the last 20 years; and what is the breakdown of this funding under care and justice functions; [39564]

(2) how much Government funding has been provided in total to St. Patrick's training school in each of the last 20 years. [39565]

Sir John Wheeler: Records readily available of Government funding at St. Patrick's or Rathgael training schools date only from 1987–88. Funding provided to the two training schools was as follows:

	Rathgael £000	*St. Patrick's £000*
1987–88	3,200	1,852
1988–89	2,907	2,247
1989–90	3,511	1,931
1990–91	3,314	2,237
1991–92	3,996	2,558
1992–93	3,874	3,077
1993–94	3,971	3,835
1994–95	4,209	4,015
1995–96	6,154	3,225

Funding levels are primarily based on average occupancy levels at the training schools. It is not readily possible to distinguish between care and justice functions.

Planning Applications

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many applications for dumps in the Ballygowan area have been *(a)* approved and *(b)* rejected in the last five years; [39590]

(2) how many objections have been received in respect of planning application 0408 relating to 35 Magherascouse road, Ballygowan; and what is the current status of this application. [39589]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subjects in question has been delegated to the Planning Service under its chief executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 24 July 1996:

Mr Moss has asked me to reply to your questions about how many applications for dumps in the Ballygowan area had been approved or rejected in the last 5 years, and how many objections had been received in respect of Planning Application 0408 relating to 35 Magherascouse Road, Ballygowan.

During the last 5 years, The Planning Service has approved 4 and rejected no applications for dumps in the Ballygowan area. As regards Planning Application 0408, the application was received on 22 May 1996 and is at an early stage in the consultation process. To date, 23 letters and 1 petition have been received objecting to the proposal.

Water Fluoridation

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many representations he has received regarding the proposed fluoridation of water in Northern Ireland; and how many have been *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against. [39594]

Mr. Moss: I have to date received a total of 158 representations, of which 30 have been in favour and 128 against the proposal.

Anglo-Irish Secretariat (Protests)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list the formal protests lodged by the Irish Government with the Anglo-Irish secretariat since November 1985, with the subject matter in each case; [39577]

(2) if he will list the protests lodged with the Irish side of the Anglo-Irish secretariat since 1985 and the subject matter. [39580]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I will write to the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Indecency Convictions

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many males *(a)* were convicted and *(b)* were cautioned in respect of the offences of gross indecency, indecent behaviour and indecent assault in 1995 which involved only males separately identifying those involving minors. [39578]

Sir John Wheeler: I will write to the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Belfast International Airport

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what criteria will be used to decide *(a)* the price and *(b)* the buyer in the sale of Belfast international airport; and if he will make a statement. [39579]

Mr. Moss: The price offered for Belfast international airport is a matter for the commercial judgment of the existing owners and the proposed purchaser.

The Government retained a reversionary interest in BIAL the principal purpose of which was to enable it to retain, for security reasons, an element of control over the identity of the owners of the property. The control mechanisms can be exercised by means of a special share and a 999-year lease. The current management of BIAL, has complied with the requirements of the special share in consulting the department with regard to the identity of the proposed purchasers.

The Government welcome this important vote of confidence in the strength and potential of the Northern Ireland economy.

Phoenix Criminal Record System

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what access the Royal Ulster Constabulary has to the Phoenix criminal record system used in Great Britain; and what is the Northern Ireland equivalent of that system. [39581]

Sir John Wheeler: The Royal Ulster Constabulary, through designated offices, can access the Phoenix criminal record system to:

(i) search and extract conviction details; and

(ii) enter and extract details of wanted or missing persons.

Criminal records within the RUC are retained on computer; the system is called CIRS—criminal information retrieval system.

Border Markers (Discussions)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he intends to enter into discussions with the Irish Government with a view to the authorities

in the Republic of Ireland marking clearly on every cross-border road where British territory ends and Irish territory begins. [39671]

Sir John Wheeler: The Government will consider raising the issue via the intergovernmental conference arrangements, but essentially the way in which roads are marked in the Republic of Ireland is a matter for the Irish Government.

Car Park Charges

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the average increase in car park charges in Department of Environment car parks in 1996; and what was the increase in car parks in Newtownards. [39655]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Roads Service under its chief executive, Mr. W. J. McCoubrey. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from W. J. McCoubrey to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your question about car park charges in Department of Environment car parks.

The average increase in car parking charges across Northern Ireland is 30%. The average increase in Newtownards is approximately 39%.

Civilian Disturbances (Deaths)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons in *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* Great Britain and *(c)* the Republic of Ireland have been killed by (i) loyalist terrorists, (ii) republican terrorists, (iii) the police and (iv) the Army since 1968 in civil disturbances in Northern Ireland; and how many in (i) to (iv) are assessed to have been (1) Protestant and (2) Roman Catholic. [39591]

Sir John Wheeler: I will write to the right hon. Gentleman.

Ulsterbus (Overcrowding)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures are in place to prevent overcrowding of buses operated by Ulsterbus. [39595]

Mr. Moss: Each bus is certified as to the number of seats and the level of standing by the public service vehicle authorities and the company adheres to these regulations. Enforcement of the regulations is carried out by the bus driver. Periodic checks, involving a physical count of passengers, are carried out by inspectors. The maximum carrying capacity is displayed on each bus.

Business Development Service

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in establishing the business development service of the Department of Finance and Personnel as a next steps agency. [39935]

Sir John Wheeler: The business development service of the Department of Finance and Personnel will be established as an executive agency on 1 October 1996. It will continue to be known as the business development service.

I have set a number of key performances targets for the agency to achieve by April 1997, as follows:

- at least 80 per cent. of customers to be satisfied with the services that they have received;
- at least 80 per cent. of customers to be satisfied with the way in which services were assessed and provided;
- an efficiency saving of 5 per cent. to be achieved in running costs over 1995–96 along with an improvement of 4 per cent. in unit costs across all services; and
- the agency to be positioned to recover the costs of its services of Telecommunications, Information Systems Services, Information Systems Personnel and Training, Thinklink, the Human Resource Management System, Forms Design and the Central Print Unit commencing on 1 April 1997, and to continue to develop mechanisms for charging for all other services.

Copies of the framework document which sets out the terms within which the agency will operate will be placed in the Library prior to the agency's launch along with its first corporate and business plan.

Parades and Marches

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will publish the terms of reference for the proposed review of parades and marches in Northern Ireland. [39936]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The review of parades and marches in Northern Ireland which I announced in the House on 15 July will have the following terms of reference:

"To review, in the light of evidence received from any interested party and having regard to the particular experience of 1996, the current arrangements for handling public processions and open-air public meetings and associated public order issues in Northern Ireland, including

- the adequacy of the current legal provisions, and in particular the adequacy of the statutory criteria used in making decisions on public processions and open-air public meetings
- the powers and responsibilities of the Secretary of State, police and others
- the possible need for new machinery, both formal and informal, to play a part in determining whether and how certain public processions and open-air public meetings should take place
- the possible role for and composition of Codes of Practice for organisers of and participants in public processions and open-air public meetings

and to make recommendations by the end of January 1997."

The review will begin as soon as possible. I hope to announce the names of those conducting the review shortly.

Health and Safety Division

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the prior options study of the health and safety division of the Department of Economic Development has been completed; and what was the outcome. [39937]

Mr. Moss: This study, which was undertaken by independent consultants, has been completed and Ministers have concluded that a new executive non-departmental public body, operating along next steps lines, should be established to carry out the functions presently exercisable by both the division and the existing Health and Safety Agency in Northern Ireland.

An Order in Council will be required to implement the recommendations and the timetable will therefore be governed by progress in the making of that order.

Public Order (Review)

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to review the handling of public order situations and the use of plastic baton rounds in Northern Ireland. [40013]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary, as part of this year's formal inspection process, will conduct a review of the RUC's procedures and training for handling public order situations including those relating to the use of plastic baton rounds. That review will take account of the disorders associated with recent marches, including the need to ensure adequate protection of RUC officers faced with determined assaults and petrol bombs. HMI's inspection report will be publicly available later this year.

Pre-school Voucher Scheme

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to have a pilot scheme in Northern Ireland to introduce the voucher system for pre-school education; and if he will make a statement. [40095]

Mr. Ancram: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

Licences

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the licences currently issued by his Department, indicating their function and the annual administrative costs for each. [37816]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 19 July 1996]:* The information requested has been placed in the Library. Other than where indicated, to provide the administrative costs of the licences would incur disproportionate cost.

Ulster Hospital (Waiting Times)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been waiting more than two years for initial appointments with consultants at the Ulster hospital; in what specialties; and what is the longest waiting time currently outstanding. [36663]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Information is not held centrally for waiting times at individual hospitals. The figure given shows the total for the Ulster North Down and Ards health and social services trust of out-patients who are waiting 24 months and over for their first out-patient appointment at the end of March 1996:

Plastic Surgery—1

Information held centrally relates only to those people waiting 24 months and over. The longest waiting time currently outstanding is not therefore readily available.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the past 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39143]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Assistance towards small firms in Northern Ireland is delivered for the Department of Economic Development by its agency the local enterprise development unit—LEDU.

LEDU's strategy forms an integral part of the Government's approach to encourage competitiveness and growth among small businesses and I am extremely encouraged that LEDU continues to build upon its excellent performance over past years. The recent study by the Northern Ireland Economic Research Council on LEDU's impact on small firm performance in Northern Ireland from 1989 to 1994, concluded that the agency is making a considerable impact on the small business population, with a 54 per cent. employment increase amongst LEDU-assisted firms over the period. In addition, turnover amongst LEDU "growth" clients increased by 40 per cent. in real terms and external sales by these companies increased by 63 per cent.

LEDU launched its new corporate plan for the period 1995 to 1998 on 29 June 1995 and it includes a revised range of performance indicators, the key ones being:

Performance indicators	*1995–96 Targets*	*1995–96 Actual*
Contracts with growth companies	150	218
Contracts with established companies	200	228
Companies participating in export development programmes	12	12
Companies participating in market awareness programmes	120	67
Startups with export potential	90	127

LEDU's end of year results for 1995–96 will be announced in September with the publication of its annual report. These will include the NIERC survey results for 1995–96.

Non-fossil Fuel Generation Targets

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the generation targets for Northern Ireland from non-fossil fuel sources for the 15 years following inception of the scheme; what amount of that generation has been installed to date; what was the original target; what amount of electricity is generated from

each source at present; what is the forecast for generation until 2011; how much electricity has been available on average to date and what percentage of installed capacity this represents from each source; and what is the cost per unit of such electricity to *(a)* the customer and *(b)* Northern Ireland Electricity. [38622]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Government established in 1993 a target of 45 MW of renewable plant by the year 2005. The first non-fossil fuel obligation order was made on 31 March 1994 requiring NIE to purchase 15.6 MW of renewable energy. Three renewable technologies; wind (12.6 MW), water (hydro) (2.4 MW) and sewage gas (0.5 MW) were for inclusion in the order. An announcement on the size and composition of a second NFFO order is expected to be made within the next few weeks.

To date, schemes with a declared net capacity of 10.8 MW—wind 10.5 MW and hydro 0.3 MW—have been installed. The wind schemes are currently generating 57 GWh per month; and the hydro schemes 0.1 GWh per month. These figures can vary significantly from month to month. The average monthly power produced by wind schemes since commissioning has been 47.0 GWh and by hydro schemes 0.06 GWh.

There will be 45 MW of electricity generated from renewable schemes by 2005. All such schemes will still be operational in 2011. It is not possible to predict the level of additional renewables capacity which may come on line between 2005 and 2011.

The installed capacity currently available from NFFP 1 is 24.7 MW—wind 98.8 per cent. and hydro 1.2 per cent.

The average cost of electricity contracted to NIE under the first NFFO order is approximately 6.0p/kWh. For consumers, when all schemes are commissioned, this will represent an increase of under 1 per cent. in electricity prices.

Plastic Bullets

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will review the use of plastic bullets in Northern Ireland; what disciplinary action has been taken against Royal Ulster Constabulary over the firing of plastic bullets; and if he will undertake a review of the numbers of people who have received injuries from plastic bullets, and the occasions on which the RUC has fired in breach of the existing rules relating to the use of baton rounds. [38960]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* Plastic bullets are not used in Northern Ireland.

On the question of a review of the use of plastic baton rounds, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave today to the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis).

Allegations of breaches of the existing rules in respect of the use of baton rounds are treated as complaints against the police and are subject to thorough investigation. Statistics show that since 1990 no RUC officer has been the subject of disciplinary action as a result of the firing of a plastic baton round.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Industrial Development Boards

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the publication date of the code of practice for industrial development boards. [36250]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Commissioner for Public Appointments' guidance on appointments to executive non-departmental public bodies and NHS bodies applies to the regional industrial development boards. No additional code of practice is to be published.

Missile Exports

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many times since 1979 his Department has approved export licences for missiles which are capable of conversion to nuclear use; and for each occasion if he will give the date of approval and the end user specified in the licence. [36763]

Mr. Oppenheim: An initial sweep of computer data—which reliably extends back only to March 1990—has shown that, even for that period, the exercise would involve the manual examination and individual technical assessment of several hundred separate licensing records. That in itself would involve disproportionate cost.

To cover the whole period would multiply that resource requirement several times, involving considerably more time-consuming manual searches.

However, the UK has been, since its inception in 1987, a full and active member of the missile technology control regime and views every application for export licences for missiles, missile systems and associated technology with care.

Computers (Millennium)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his recent meeting with leaders of industry to discuss the effect of the century date change on computer systems. [37491]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I held a meeting on 9 July with representatives of industry and the Bank of England to discuss the impact of the century date change on computer systems in the private sector. The common assessment was that the problem was serious and that reaction by senior management was inadequate. Many companies are not aware of the issue. Others are aware but have yet to audit their own systems, or to tackle the problem with the necessary urgency. Those who are furthest advanced in taking action are reporting very significant costs to put it right.

I therefore asked the Confederation of British Industry, representing users, and the Computer Services and Software Association, representing suppliers, to set up a joint task force to take stock of activities already under way, and to co-ordinate action across the UK. The objectives are to ensure that senior management in all companies are aware of the issue and that they have access to appropriate help. The Federation of the Electronic Industry will support the task force, the DTI will work closely with it and links will be made with the

central IT unit and CCTA to share experience and address issues across the public/private sector boundary. The task force will report on progress in September.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the last 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39147]

Mr. Page: The DTI report "Small Firms in Britain 1996" was published at the beginning of July and a copy was sent to all Members. The report sets out current Government policy for small businesses and includes key statistical indicators.

"Your Business Matters—Government Response" was published as a companion document to the third competitiveness White Paper. The response outlines 30 measures aimed at helping small businesses to prosper and grow. The progress in implementing these measures will be monitored closely.

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in his name, or that of other Ministers in his Department, for meetings with Conservative hon. Members immediately preceding questions to his Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39523]

Mr. Lang: Meeting rooms have been booked on five occasions this Session.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Rendel: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many visits *(a)* the Secretary of State and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department have made to (i) the Newbury constituency and (ii) other constituencies in the last 12 months. [39778]

Mr. Lang: According to our records, four visits have been made by DTI Ministers to the Newbury constituency during the last 12 months.

It would not be possible to answer the second part of the question except at disproportionate cost.

Domestic Telephone Bills

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the average domestic telephone bill in the year before the privatisation of British Telecom; and what is the current equivalent. [37668]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Prices for a basket of BT's commonly used services have fallen by 40 per cent. in real terms since 1984. I understand from BT that the median quarterly bill of a typical residential customer in the year prior to privatisation was £25.82—excluding connection charges. This represents £45.59 in 1995–96 terms—adjusted for inflation. Since then, residential phone users on average have increased their use of the telephone, and this is reflected in the median quarterly BT residential bill in 1995–96 being £46.31. Over this period, residential phone users have benefited from significant reductions in the real price of individual services, and innovative improvements in quality.

Universities

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what his Department is doing to help increase the flow of resources from industry to the university sector. [37281]

Mr. Ian Taylor: My Department's support for technology foresight, Link and the industrial units scheme and our funding of relevant and collaborative research through the research councils are examples of support which encourages companies to work with the university sector to improve national competitiveness and quality of life. Other schemes such as the realising our potential award and foresight challenge have brought industrial funds into academia. Further information is given in our annual report, which is available in the Library of the House.

Companies House

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many complaints of *(a)* victimisation, *(b)* unfairness and *(c)* discrimination have been made in respect of Companies House in each of the last two years; how many have gone to *(a)* appeal and *(b)* tribunal; how many have been settled; and in each case what was the cost involved. [39533]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have asked the chief executive of Companies House executive agency to reply to the hon. Member directly.

Letter from John S. Holden to Mr. Rhodri Morgan, dated 24 July 1996:

In response to your recent Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade, I trust the following information is helpful.

The table summaries formal complaints made during the last two years (to July 1996) at Companies House.

	Year 1	*Year 2*	*Appeal*	*Tribunal*	*Settled*
Victimisation	—	2	1	—	—
Unfairness	1	1	2	—	2
Discrimination	—	1	1	—	1

Apart from internal management time and costs associated with investigation, appeal and legal advice no other costs have been incurred to date. Two cases remain to be settled and any potential cost involved in settlement has not yet been finalised.

Working Time Directive

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to meet his European Union counterparts to discuss the working time directive. [37290]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has no such plans at present. If the judgment of the European Court of Justice follows the opinion of the Advocate General, we will raise the question of treaty changes in the intergovernmental conference.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the numbers of people likely to be affected by the working time directive; and what percentage he estimates would refuse to agree in any circumstances to work more than 48 hours. [37300]

Mr. Taylor: My Department estimates that some 2.1 million employees do not conform with the daily and weekly rest provisions in the working time directive; 2.7 million regularly work more than 48 hours a week; and about 0.2 million work over the directive's night work limit. Up to 3.8 million workers could be affected by the directive's paid holiday provisions. There is no information about how many of those who currently work more than 48 hours a week might refuse to do so.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about the financing implications for the United Kingdom's economy of a maximum 48-hour working week. [37683]

Mr. Taylor: My Department has received a wide range of representations about the working time directive. Many of these have been from organisations concerned about its potential cost implications.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action the Government proposes to prevent the application of the working time directive in the United Kingdom from 23 November. [37283]

Mr. Taylor: The Government have challenged the legal basis of the working time directive in the European Court of Justice, and will be pursuing their fundamental concerns in the intergovernmental conference.

Power Stations (Bovine Wastes)

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress is being made with the proposals for burning bovine wastes in power stations; what further regulatory clearances will be required for such disposal; and how environmental costs will be addressed. [40101]

Mr. Lang: The Government are exploring all practical options for the disposal, after rendering, of wastes arising from the over 30-month slaughter scheme, that is, tallow and meat and bone meal. Among other steps, it has asked the power generators to consider the possibility of burning such wastes in power stations. National Power and PowerGen are currently conducting combustion testing on the materials at combustion test facilities at Didcot, Oxfordshire and Ratcliffe on Soar, Nottinghamshire, respectively. These tests are being monitoring by the Environment Agency.

It is too early to say whether burning of these materials in power stations will be feasible. If it is, however, authorisation by the Environment Agency—or in Scotland by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency—under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 would be required for any variations in the authorised process at any station proposed to be used. The relevant agency would have to consider whether any proposed variations were substantial. If it so concludes, the proposals must be advertised, and 28 days allowed for representations before the agency decides whether to authorise the proposed variations.

There might also be a need to vary the consents which have been given to the operation of power stations under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989. Alternatively, it may be appropriate to disapply section 36 as provided for in section 36(4), in which case normal planning rules would apply in respect of any proposed changes to any station for this purpose. In either case, an environmental impact assessment may be required if the proposed changes were likely to have a significant effect on the environment.

British Coal (Recreational Land)

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what arrangements are in place to ensure that British Coal's recreational land is safeguarded for future recreational use. [40102]

Mr. Page: The Government have consistently made clear their intention that British Coal land currently in active use for sport and recreation should be retained for those purposes. To that end, the Prime Minister announced today, at the launch of the first annual report for "Sport Raising the Game", that it has now been agreed by British Coal and the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation that British Coal's freehold interest in its recreational land should be transferred to CISWO. This transfer will be on the basis that existing tenants will, generally, be offered new, long-term leases requiring that the land continues to be used for recreational purposes.

Medical Research Council

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the forthcoming prior options reviews of units sponsored by the Medical Research Council. [40103]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government announced on 29 September 1995 that all public sector research establishments would be subject to prior options reviews.

Reviews are now beginning of the MRC's arrangements for sponsoring the Dunn nutrition unit, virology unit, toxicology unit, reproductive biology unit, radiation and genome stability unit and mammalian genetics unit.

These reviews will take place alongside those of establishments parented or sponsored by other Government Departments which are carrying out work in similar or related fields. The reviews will build on any relevant recent studies.

I should welcome comments from interested parties. Comments should be sent by 15 September 1996 to:

Dr. Declan Mulkeen, Corporate Affairs Group, MRC Head Office, 20 Park Crescent, London W1N 4AL.

Management Information System for Ministers

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he plans to publish his Department's annual MINIS return. [40105]

Mr. Lang: The MINIS 96 returns for the Department, including its efficiency plan, were published on 24 July 1996. A set has been placed in the Library of the House.

Radiocommunications Agency

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the revised framework document for the Radiocommunications Agency is to be published. [40100]

Mr. Lang: The Radiocommunications Agency's revised framework document has been published today. A copy of the revised framework document and a copy of an evaluation report on the performance of the Radiocommunications Agency since its inception as an executive agency in April 1990 have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Export Controls

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action the Government have taken to follow up Sir Richard Scott's recommendation for a review of export controls. [40104]

Mr. Lang: In line with Sir Richard's recommendation at chapter K3.6 of his report, I am today publishing a consultative document on strategic export controls, Cm 3349, which will be available via HMSO, and am placing copies in the Libraries of both Houses. I have asked for responses to be made to my Department by 31 October. After this consultation, and depending on what decisions are taken, the Government may need to undertake further more detailed consultation with directly interested parties as proposals for change are worked up in detail.

Industrial Relations

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the current state of industrial relations; and if he will make a statement. [37276]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Industrial relations have improved immensely since the 1960s and 1970s. Strikes in Britain remain at historically very low levels, with only 0.42 million working days lost in the 12 months to April 1996 compared with annual averages of 7.2 million in the 1980s and 12.9 million in the 1970s.

Royal Mail

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library a copy of his letter of last week to the chairman of Royal Mail concerning a suspension of Royal Mail's monopoly on letters costing less than £1 to send. [38489]

Mr. Lang: I have placed in the Libraries of both Houses a copy of my letter dated 12 July to Sir Michael Heron, the chairman of the Post Office, which initiated consultations with the Post Office about the implications of a suspension of the statutory monopoly on the delivery of letters for under £1.

Departmental Vehicles (Traffic Violations)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the number of traffic violations involving departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39300]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Any driver of a DTI vehicle is personally accountable for any traffic violations when in charge of the vehicle and for any costs incurred as a result. The Department's records are, therefore, very limited. We are aware of three tickets for speeding between 1990 and 1994 and six parking tickets between 1993 and 1996. We do not know the amount of the fines that were paid.

The vehicles currently owned by the Department are not used and are in the process of being sold. There is no intention to replace them.

Low Pay

Mr. McAllion: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will take steps to combat low pay; and if he will make a statement. [37294]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The improved performance of the British economy since 1979, particularly the huge increase in productivity and low inflation, has allowed for significant increases in real wages at all levels, including the lower paid. This is in direct contrast to the late 1970s when low productivity meant that increases in earnings fed through to higher prices and increased inflation.

South West Industrial Development Board

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list the occasions between January 1980 and December 1984 on which members of his Department's south-west industrial office have absented themselves from board meetings because of potential conflicts of interest, indicating *(a)* the date, *(b)* the board members, *(c)* the company, *(d)* the value of the financial assistance applied for, *(e)* the value of the assistance subsequently offered and *(f)* the potential conflict of interest; [35244]

(2) if he will list the occasions between January 1985 and December 1989 on which members of his Department's south-west industrial office have absented themselves from board meetings because of potential conflicts of interest, indicating *(a)* the date, *(b)* the board members, *(c)* the company, *(d)* the value of the financial assistance applied for, *(e)* the value of the assistance subsequently offered and *(f)* the potential conflict of interest. [35245]

Mr. Lang *[holding answers 1 July 1996]:* Listed in the table are the occasions when members of the South West industrial development board are known to have absented themselves—because of potential conflicts of interest—from discussions between 1980 and 1989 of cases which subsequently resulted in offers of regional selective assistance.

Unfortunately, this list may be incomplete. The files containing the full minutes of the board before early 1988 were destroyed after a set period in accordance with the records management procedures then in place in the Department's south-west regional office—now absorbed in the Government office for the south-west. We have, however, been able to establish some earlier abstentions from other sources.

I should make it clear that, throughout this period, board members declared directorships and similar substantial interests in companies both on appointment and when lists of forthcoming cases were regularly

circulated. Where such declarations had been made, the members concerned would neither have seen the papers relating to applications from those companies nor have attended relevant discussions of the board.

Date	*Board member*	*Cases*	*Grant applied for* £	*Grant offered* £
13 December 1983	K. Holmes	Marine Projects (Plymouth) Ltd.	76,000	[1]110,000
29 October 1985	V. Parsons	Wandel and Goltermann Ltd.	400,000	400,000
28 October 1986	K. Holmes	Marine Projects (Plymouth) Ltd.	300,000	300,000
22 March 1988	G. Hoare	J and F Pool Ltd.	250,000	75,000
28 February 1989	K. Holmes	Marine Projects (Plymouth) Ltd.	1,000,000	800,000
25 July 1989	R. Harris	Ranco Controls Ltd.	400,000	400,000

[1] For expanded project.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 18 June, *Official Report*, columns *458–59*, in what circumstances the financial assistance schemes mentioned go before the industrial development board for scrutiny and approval; and what other procedures are followed. [37713]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* Offers of regional selective assistance cases involving potential grant above a set level—which in the case of the south-west was until recently £100,000 but is now £250,000—but not exceeding £2 million are considered by a regional industrial development board—or, exceptionally, by the national industrial development advisory board. Offers of grant below the set level may be approved by officials without reference to the boards but officials have discretion to seek board advice in any case where they consider it desirable to do so. Offers of regional selective assistance above £2 million are normally appraised in headquarters and considered by the industrial development advisory board. All offers of £1 million or more are subject to ministerial approval.

Offers of assistance under the other schemes referred to in my earlier answer have been considered by officials within guidelines and against criteria approved by Ministers, without reference to external advisory boards but subject to ministerial approval above certain thresholds.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial assistance has been given by his Department since 1980 to Company A, the identity having been supplied to him, by *(a)* type of grant, *(b)* date offered, including month and *(c)* date of payment, including month. [37644]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* Company A was offered regional selective assistance of £2 million in October 1989. Payment was made in four instalments as follows:

January 1991: £400,000

December 1991: £800,000

December 1992: £400,000

December 1993: £400,000

No other assistance has been offered under the Department's principal regional, enterprise and technology schemes; nor has any loan to the company been covered under the small firms loan guarantee scheme.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 18 June, *Official Report*, columns *461–64*, under what terms the financial assistance to Magrathea (Pendennis) Ltd. was granted; what is the company's current status; what assessment he has made of the productiveness of the grant; and if he will make a statement. [37647]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* Magrathea (Pendennis) Ltd. was offered regional selective assistance of £400,000 on 31 May 1994 to enable the company to establish a facility for the manufacture of marine components at Pendennis shipyard, Falmouth. The project had created 13 full-time jobs out of a total expected of 32 when the company suffered a major fire at the yard in October 1994 and subsequently went into receivership. A liquidator was appointed in February this year, and the Government office for the south-west has sought recovery of the total grant paid—£320,000. It is possible that Magrathea 2000 Ltd., which has bought the assets of Magrathea (Pendennis) Ltd. will continue the project.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if Mr. D was a member of his Department's South West industrial development board at the time of *(a)* the application and *(b)* the offer of any financial assistance since 1985 to company A, the identities having been supplied to him; [37642]

(2) if, during his tenure on his Department's South West industrial development board, Mr. D was obliged to absent himself from any meetings due to a potential conflict of interest arising from his directorship and shareholding in company A, the identities having been supplied to him; [37645]

(3) what role Mr. D has played in the granting of financial assistance by his Department to company A, the identities having been supplied to him. [37646]

Mr. Lang *[holding answers 17 July 1996]:* Mr. D was a member of the industrial development board when regional selective assistance was applied for, and offered to, company A in 1989. Because of the size of the application, the case was—in accordance with normal procedures—appraised centrally and not considered by the regional board; nor did Mr. D play any other role in the granting of the assistance. The Department is unaware of any instance where Mr. D's interests in company A necessitated his abstention from discussion by the board of applications by other companies.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board if Mr. B of his Department's South West industrial development board absented himself from board meetings discussing grant applications from company A due to a potential conflict of interest as a senior partner of the firm advising this company on its grant application; and if he will make a statement. [37643]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* As explained in my answer to a previous question, the board did not discuss the regional selective assistance application from company A.

Inward Investment

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the 10 largest industrial or commercial developments in England which resulted from inward investment since 1993; and, in each case, what estimate he has made of the number of jobs created and the average cost to public funds for each of these jobs. [37637]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* A full answer can be given only at disproportionate cost. Inward investment includes takeovers, expansions and joint ventures as well as new greenfield projects. Not all these will be eligible for public assistance.

Sellafield (Plutonium Store)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what meetings have been held under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency or other relevant bodies concerning the establishment of an international regional plutonium store at Sellafield since his answer of 13 July 1993, *Official Report*, columns *430–31*. [38242]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 19 July 1996]:* None.

Non-toxic Gunshot

Mr. Morley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to amend the international proof convention on small arms to permit and facilitate the use of non-toxic gunshot. [38793]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* No steps are necessary. There is no current rule either domestic or made under the Permanent International Commission for the Proof of Small Arms—CIP—which restricts the use of non-toxic shot in guns. However, in certain situations, steel shot can damage gun barrels with implications for consumer safety. CIP has now produced regulations to avoid the sale of steel shot cartridges above a certain size and velocity.

Exports

Mr. Amess: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the 10 largest manufactured exports from the United Kingdom at the eight digit standard international trade classification level. [38970]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* The information is given in the following table:

UK top ten exports—1995

Rank	*Commodity code*	*Description*	*£ million*
1	84719180	Digital processing units other than for use in civil aircraft	3,398
2	71023100	Diamonds, sorted	2,410
3	87032319	Motor vehicles, new, with an engine exceeding 1,500 cc not exceeding 3,000 cc	2,397
4	30049019	Medicaments (including veterinary) other than containing iodine, packaged for retail sale	2,054
5	87032410	Motor vehicles, new, with an engine exceeding 3,000 cc	1,733
6	84733010	Electronic assemblies of automatic data processing machines	1,642
7	84733090	Other parts and accessories of automatic data processing machines	1,638
8	85252090	Radio transmitters-receivers, other than for use in civil aircraft	1,467
9	88033010	Other parts of civil aircraft, other than propellers, undercarriage, tyres, electrical parts	1,353
10	87089998	Parts and accessories for motor vehicles chassis without engines	1,327

Source:
Overseas Trade Statistics of the UK.

Space Policy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was discussed, and what conclusions were reached, at his seminar on space policy with industry on 25 June; and what date has been set for the next one. [38891]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* The space policy forum I held on 25 June was extremely successful and was attended by representatives from across the space community. The forum considered the whole range of issues affecting the sector and made an invaluable contribution to the forward plan for UK space activities, which I am publishing today. This process forms an essential part of UK space policy. I look forward to further regular consultation with the space community within the framework set by the plan.

Export Guarantees Advisory Council

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Export Guarantees Advisory Council *(a)* publishes its advice to Government and *(b)* publishes an annual report; and if in each case this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [37903]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The Export Guarantees Advisory Council is a purely advisory body appointed under the terms of the Export and Investment Guarantees Act 1991. Its function is to advise the Secretary of State, at his request, in respect of any matter relating to the exercise of his functions under the Act. Its members receive no remuneration.

The answers to both the specific questions are no.

Enterprise Zones

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the enterprise zones created in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [39559]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

In the last three years, the enterprise zones created have been east midlands, Dearne Valley and east Durham—all designated in 1995—and Tyne riverside which is in the process of being designated this year.

Since the enterprise zone scheme was introduced in 1981, the Government have developed a range of alternative schemes to promote regeneration and growth. These are generally better targeted and can be

implemented more rapidly than the enterprise zones scheme which, in part as a result of EC regulations, can take up to three years to designate. Enterprise zones can affect economic activity over wide areas through displacement effects and are not the appropriate regeneration measure in most circumstances. In December 1987, the Government announced that the enterprise zone scheme would not be extended other than in exceptional circumstances.

Considerate Constructors Scheme

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action his Department has taken to support and promote the building industry's considerate constructors scheme; and if he will make a statement. [39797]

Mr. Clappison: I have been asked to reply.

The considerate constructors scheme is an initiative being piloted by the Construction Industry Board, chaired by Sir Michael Latham. Both the board and the scheme have the full support of the Government.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her Department's budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media. [39341]

Mr. Sproat: None. My Department does not employ consultants within these areas.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many staff are assumed in her Department's budget, employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, *(a)* to work on press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39468]

Mr. Sproat: Staff in the information division work on publicity and press projects. There are currently 12 full-time information grade posts, and no part-time posts.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many staff were employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94. [39423]

Mr. Sproat: Staff in the information division work on publicity and press projects. The number of information grade posts in each of the past three years has been:

1995–96: 10

1994–95: 11

1993–94: 11

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the cost of staff employed full time or part time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work on the press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94. [39407]

Mr. Sproat: Staff in information division of the Department of National Heritage work on press and publicity projects. The total cost for both (i) and (ii) of staff employed full time or part time was:

(a) £390,864

(b) £435,818

(c) £428,685

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what is the cost, assumed in the budget, of people employed full time or part time to work on the press and the media in 1996–97; [39977]

(2) what is the cost budgeted for staff, employed full time or part time, to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39447]

Mr. Sproat: The total cost budgeted for staff employed full time or part time in the Department of National Heritage, to provide information and publicity and to work on the press and the media in 1996–97 is £455,380.

Staff in information division of the Department of National Heritage work on both press and publicity projects.

Film Industry

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects to receive the report from the Middleton committee on the future financing of the film industry; and if she will make a statement. [39693]

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend expects to receive the report on 31 July.

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects to receive the report from the Advisory Committee on Film Finance on the future financing of the United Kingdom film industry. [39584]

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend expects to receive the report on 31 July.

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are the levels of investment in United Kingdom film production in 1996–97. [39586]

Mr. Sproat: Figures for 1996–97 are not available, but the total investment in UK-linked films going into production in the first half of the calendar year 1996 was reported to be £333 million.

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the agencies which have made representations to the Middleton committee on the film industry. [39585]

Mr. Sproat: The following organisations have made representations to the advisory committee:

Premier Media Ltd.

British Film Institute

British Screen Advisory Council

Candover Services Ltd.

Cinema Exhibitors Association

Durlacher and Co., Plc

European Film Finance and Insurers Association

Film Financing Ltd

Film Investment and Loan Management Services Ltd.

Guardian Royal Exchange

Heath Martens Horner Ltd.

Hydra Associates Ltd.

KPMG

Legal and General Investment Management

Mercury Asset Management

Midland Bank Plc

Nat West Markets

National Film and Television School

Pearson Television

Rank Organisation

Royal Bank of Scotland

Rutherford Asset Management

Shepperton Studios

Society of Film Distributors

United International Pictures (UK)

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in her name, or that of other Ministers in her Department, for meetings with Conservative hon. Members immediately preceding questions to her Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39530]

Mr. Sproat: On no occasions.

National Heritage Memorial Fund

Mr. Patten: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many applications for support from the national heritage memorial fund have been received for projects *(a)* of a specifically Christian nature and *(b)* which recognise the millennium as marking 2,000 years since the birth of Jesus Christ; of those how many have been approved; and at what cost. [39583]

Mr. Sproat: The heritage lottery fund does not categorise by religious denomination. However, to date 566 applications have been received from religious organisations 31 per cent. of total—asking for grants amounting to £57,505,362. Eighty-seven grants have been awarded to religious organisations, 23 per cent. of total grants awarded amounting to £8,024,510.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the total national lottery funding allocated for distribution through the heritage commission in 1995–96; what sum is planned for 1996–97; what was the total sum allocated and paid through the commission in 1995–96; and what sum has been allocated and paid to date in 1996–97. [40039]

Mr. Sproat: The total national lottery funding allocated for distribution through the national heritage memorial fund in 1995–96 was £305 million; of this, £40.4 million was drawn down in that year. A total of £33.6 million has been drawn down in 1996–97 out of a planned expenditure of £197 million. Estimated income for the NHMF in 1996–97 is £250 million.

Loan Indemnification

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the total value of contingent liabilities arising from her indemnification, under section 16 of the National Heritage Act 1980, of loans from the Gilbert collection to the Victoria and Albert museum. [40030]

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend made a written statement to the House on 5 June 1996 at columns *499-500* setting out the total value of statutory contingent liabilities arising from all section 16 indemnities that remained outstanding at 31 March 1996. Since making that report, we have indemnified, under section 16 of the National Heritage Act 1980, a number of loans by the Gilbert Public Arts Foundation to the Victoria and Albert museum. The current total value of statutory contingent liabilities arising from these particular undertakings is £33,140,563. The Gilbert loans comprise an outstanding collection of more than 600 pieces of historic English and continental gold and silversmiths' work from about 1500 to 1830 and the definitive group of micromosaics and pietra dura furniture. The objects will be with the V and A for about three years and a number of them will be on display to the public.

British Academy of Sport

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress has been made in establishing the British academy of sport. [40021]

Mr. Sproat: Details of the Government's proposals for the British academy of sport, as the pinnacle of a regional network of centres of sporting excellence and academies for particular sports, are set out in the bid prospectus, which is published today. Bidders have until 31 October to submit their bids, and it is hoped that a final decision will be reached by the end of January 1997.

I have placed copies of the prospectus in the Libraries of the House.

"Sport: Raising the Game"

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress has been made on implementing the initiatives set out in "Sport: Raising the Game". [40086]

Mr. Sproat: We have today published "Sport: Raising the Game—The First Year Report", which reports progress on all 38 action points set out in the sports policy statement published last July.

The report shows that real progress has been made in the past year, but it also emphasises our determination to sustain the momentum in the coming year.

In schools, a revised physical education curriculum, with greater emphasis on team games, was introduced in August 1995.

From the 1996–97 academic year, schools' annual reports and prospectuses will include information on sporting aims, provision and achievements.

In October, secondary schools, which have particularly good policies for sport, will be able to apply for a sportsmark award. The first awards will be made in April 1997.

From this summer, games that are offered as part of the formal PE curriculum will be inspected and reported on by Ofsted. Inspectors will also report on extra-curricular sporting provision made by the school.

The Ofsted survey of good practice in school PE was published in December 1995, and a summary was sent to all schools in January 1996.

For the first time, Her Majesty's chief inspector's annual report in February 1996 addressed the state of both curriculum PE and extra-curricular activities and sport in schools.

Pilot "Coaching Weeks for Teachers" are under way, involving 300 to 500 teachers and trainee teachers. The aim is to mount a nationwide programme in 1997–98.

Schools can claim up to 80 per cent. of the costs of a new facility from the lottery sports fund for projects linked with their communities and sports clubs.

A £2 million challenge fund, to promote links between schools and clubs, has been established by the Sports Council. Applications will be invited from schools, clubs and governing bodies of sport this October.

From 5 August, following concern that too many school, and other, playing fields had been sold off, the Sports Council will be a statutory consultee for planning applications affecting playing fields.

Under the Sports Council's priority areas initiative, announced earlier this year, up to 90 per cent. lottery funding is now available for projects in defined areas of recreational and social deprivation.

The Further Education Funding Council published a report last month focusing on good sporting practice in further education colleges.

The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the Standing Conference of Principals will be publishing an audit of higher education sports facilities and provision in the autumn.

The report of the working group on university sports scholarships, chaired by Sir Roger Bannister, was published last month. The report highlights the increasing importance of the higher education sector in providing opportunities for the development of sporting excellence. Its main recommendation is that increased investment in talented sports men and women attending university, through lottery-funded sports scholarships, is an essential step in ensuring the development of our sporting elite.

Details of the Government's proposals for the British academy of sport, as the pinnacle of a regional network of centres of sporting excellence and academies of particular sports, are included in the bid prospectus which is published today. Bidders have until 31 October to submit their bids, and it is hoped that a final decision will be reached by the end of January 1997.

The first year report also reports on the restructuring of the sports councils, the very successful first year of the lottery sports fund, the launch in March 1996 of the national junior sport programme, and on initiatives taken by governing bodies of sport and local authorities relating to school sport.

I have today placed copies of "Sport: Raising the Game—The First Year Report" in the Libraries of the House.

BBC Transmitter Network

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the proposals for the privatisation of the BBC's transmitter network; and what assessment she has made of the impact this will have on the provision of NICAM broadcasting facilities throughout the BBC's transmitter network. [38643]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* As we announced last November, the BBC is handling the arrangements for the sale of its transmission assets. I understand that the BBC remains committed to an extension of NICAM stereo sound coverage as part of its continuing programme of investment in its transmitter network. It is for the BBC to determine the rate and order of this programme in the light of its resources and other engineering priorities. This position will not be affected by the privatisation of the transmission network.

Lottery Funding (Wales)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list under each head through which money is available from the national lottery the organisations in Wales which have been allocated money; and what assessment she has made of the take-up rate of the allocations. [38840]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* To date, 767 awards in Wales totalling £152,278,948 have been made. I will write to the hon. Member with a full list of these awards. National lottery awards are made in response to applications.

Millennium Fund

Mr. Patten: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) how many projects supported by the millennium fund *(a)* recognise the millennium as marking 2,000 years since the birth of Jesus Christ and *(b)* otherwise have a specifically Christian character; [39582]

(2) how many schemes have been approved and of what value from the millennium fund; how many of these and at what value *(a)* specifically recognise that the year 2,000 as marking the birth of Jesus Christ and *(b)* are of a Christian nature; and what percentage of the total approved schemes by number and value these represent. [39652]

Mr. Sproat: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage will reply to the hon. Member in her capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of her reply in the Libraries of the House.

National Lottery

Mr. Dixon: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the grants awarded by the national lottery organisations in *(a)* the Jarrow constituency, *(b)* the South Tyneside district council area and *(c)* the Tyne and Wear area. [38014]

Mr. Sproat: Lottery grants to the Jarrow constituency and South Tyneside district council are listed. It is not possible to generate figures for Tyne and Wear because it does not have precisely defined boundaries. To date, there have been 346 awards in the north-east region for a total of £91,646,291. I will write to the hon. Member with a full list of these awards.

Awards made in the Jarrow Constituency to date

Body	*Award date*	*Recipient*	*Project title/description*	*Award amount* £
Arts	24 January 1996	Groundwork South Tyneside	Groundwork Eco Office proposal	95,000.00
NLCB	11 June 1996	The Jazzmanelles	Purchase of new uniforms for 35 members, including musical equipment to encourage self respect and participation	5,500.00
Sports	5 June 1995	Whitburn Cricket Club	Purchase of Cricket Pitch and Clubhouse	78,000.00
Sports	7 November 1995	Whitburn Community Association	Extend existing changing block	22,948.00
		4 Awards	Total	201,448.00

Awards to date in the South Tyneside District Council area

Body	*Award date*	*Recipient*	*Project title/description*	*Award amount* £
Arts	24 January 1996	Groundwork South Tyneside	Groundwork Eco Office proposal	95,000.00
NLCB	11 June 1996	The Jazzmanelles	Purchase of new uniforms for 35 members, including musical equipment to encourage self respect and participation	5,500.00
Sports	5 June 1995	Whitburn Cricket Club	Purchase of Cricket Pitch and Clubhouse	78,000.00
Sports	7 November 1995	Whitburn Community Association	Extend existing changing block	22,948.00
Arts	15 May 1996	The Customs House	Feasibility study	61,450.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	Apna Ghar Women's Centre	Technology Training for Ethnic Minority Women	193,500.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	South Tyneside Womens Aid	Improve Safety and Surroundings for Distressed Women and Children	9,176.00
NLCB	11 June 1996	South Tyneside Training and Enterprise Network (Ten)	50% contribution to TEN's core funding enabling further economic regeneration at grass-roots. Salary and office costs.	96,662.00
NLCB	11 June 1996	Simonside Youth Centre	Outdoor clothing, camping and sports equipment for 10 disadvantaged youth for Duke of Ed.Award South Shields	8,000.00
NLCB	11 June 1996	South Tyneside Citizens Advice Bureau	Refurbishment 2 offices, employment 1 full time, 2 part time and support for tribunal representation and housebound South Shields	197,710.00
NLCB	11 June 1996	John Wright Centre Social Club	The acquisition of a replacement ambulance for a social club for people with physical and/or learning disabilities.	29,360.00
NLCB	11 June 1996	Womens Hath in South Tyneside	The provision of health information, counselling and support for women	336,845.00
Sports	7 July 1995	South Shields Sports Club	New Hardcourts	29,420.00
		13 Awards	Total	1,163,571.00

British Cycling Federation

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what monitoring she conducts of the extent to which sports governing bodies let contracts in receipt of Sports Council grants to suppliers of goods and services in ways which are open and transparent and which comply with proper codes of accounting practice, with particular reference to the British Cycling Federation. [38695]

Mr. Sproat: Government support to individual governing bodies of sport is primarily channelled through the Sports Council, an independent body set up by royal charter. All sports governing bodies in receipt of Sports Council grants are required to have their annual accounts audited and to supply a copy of these audited accounts to the Sports Council. The Sports Council's liaison officers have regular informal meetings with officials of the governing bodies and have the right to attend meetings of relevant committees. This applies to the British Cycling Federation. The Comptroller and Auditor General may conduct more detailed audits. The Sports Council also has the right to conduct more detailed audits and the council's management audit programme includes a review of the operations of a sample of governing bodies in receipt of Sports Council grants. The British Cycling Federation has a formal tendering process for contracts which is administered by the directors of the British Cycling Federation/British Cycling Federation Promotions Ltd. It is established custom and practice for members of the Executive to declare any conflict of interest.

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what reports he has received from the auditors of the British Cycling Federation in relation to contractual links between the federation and *(a)* Impsport Ltd., *(b)* Fletcher Marketing and *(c)* Sports Ambassador Ltd. [38636]

Mr. Sproat: Government support to the individual governing bodies of sport is primarily channelled through the Sports Council, an independent body set up by royal charter. All sports governing bodies in receipt of Sports

Council grants are required to have their annual accounts audited and to supply a copy of these audited accounts to the Sports Council. I understand from the Sports Council that no report has been received, nor has one been requested, from the auditors of the British Cycling Federation in relation to contractual links between the Federation and *(a)* Impsport Ltd. *(b)* Fletcher Marketing and *(c)* Sports Ambassador Ltd.

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she will take to protect public funds given to the British Cycling Federation by the Sports Council in respect of the legal proceedings between the British Cycling Federation and its former president. [39135]

Mr. Sproat: The Sports Council has advised the British Cycling Federation formally that the grant it receives cannot be used to pay any legal fees or costs associated with the legal proceedings between the British Cycling Federation and its former president. The Sports Council's liaison officers have regular informal meetings with officials of the governing bodies and have the right to attend meetings of relevant committees. The Sports Council also has the right to conduct detailed audits and review the operations of governing bodies in receipt of Sports Council grants. The Sports Council will continue to monitor the position closely to ensure that the British Cycling Federation honours the terms of its agreement with the council.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* her policies and *(b)* the work of her Department in helping small businesses in the past 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if she will publish the performance indicators by which her Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39153]

Mr. Sproat: The Government recognise the crucial role played by small firms in the UK economy and aim to help them by providing sound economic conditions—keeping inflation and interest rates low; reducing legislative, administrative and taxation burdens; and where appropriate providing direct assistance in the form of specialist advice and support, and easing access to finance.

My Department has particular interest in the tourism industry. The overwhelming majority of tourism-related businesses are small firms, so the Department's sponsorship support for the industry mainly helps the small firms sector.

My Department has continued to pursue an active sponsorship role in relation to the tourism industry and develop its strategy to assist the industry in improving its competitiveness.

In November 1995, the Department and the English tourist board published "Hotels: The Consumer View", which summarised findings from research into consumer expectations of hotel accommodation. In March 1996, we published "Benchmarking for Smaller Hotels", the outcome of an innovative project to help small hoteliers improve quality, value for money and profitability. Some 50,000 copies of the report and a user-friendly self-assessment test have been disseminated. We will publish the findings of a wide-ranging review of the use of human resources in the tourism industry in the autumn, and with the ETB we have commissioned a study of the domestic tourism market designed to help us determine how the Department and tourist boards can most productively intervene in the future.

The Department has continued to work within the Government to ease the burden of regulation and red tape on the tourism industry. There has been significant progress in this area, with many measures that we have taken benefiting the industry. For example, new risk assessment-based food hygiene regulations came into effect on 15 September 1995. Liquor licensing and Sunday trading restrictions have been relaxed. Revised regulations, significantly widening eligibility for white-on-brown directional road signs to tourist attractions and facilities, came into effect in January 1996. The industry was able to voice its current concerns on regulatory issues at the tourism and hospitality deregulation seminar in Brighton on 15 May 1996. The tourism industry is represented on the permanent deregulation task force. On 14 June 1996, the Department announced the formation of a group of tourism and hospitality experts to complement the work of the Department and the tourist boards in helping to improve the industry's international competitiveness.

The national lottery, which began in November 1994, has also benefited many small businesses; in particular, the thousands of small retailers who sell tickets, and businesses offering ancillary services to the lottery operator. Camelot Group plc's 1995–96 results revealed that a total of £265 million had been paid to retailers in the financial year, an average of £8,750 per outlet.

My Department will continue to work within Government to set the right climate within which small tourism-related businesses can flourish. The Department is represented on the ministerial group on small firms.

Manchester Velodrome

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the financial future of the Manchester velodrome following the threat of legal action between the British Cycling Federation and its former president; and what contingency plans the Government have in place to protect the future of the velodrome. [39136]

Mr. Sproat: The Manchester velodrome is protected by being operated by a separate legal entity—Manchester Velodrome Ltd. This company is a wholly owned subsidiary of the British Cycling Federation. The Sports Council has entered into a formal agreement with Manchester Velodrome Ltd. which requires the operational and accounting records of the company to be kept clearly separate from the records of any other activities of the British Cycling Federation and its associated companies and any related organisations, and that all transactions between these parties is to be on a full commercial basis.

Sports Council

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement about the appointment of ministerial nominees to the new English Sports Council. [40020]

Mr. Sproat: I am pleased to announce that, at a meeting of the Privy Council on 23 July, Her Majesty the Queen approved the grant of charters establishing the English and United Kingdom sports councils. The new charters will come into effect later in the summer and the sports councils will be fully operational on the new basis after the summer break.

The Secretary of State for National Heritage intends to appoint up to five ministerial nominees in each region of the English Sports Council to promote the development and practice of sport in those regions. Further nominees will be announced in due course, drawing on suggestions from the sector. For the present the Secretary of State proposes to appoint the following persons and designate them under provision in the new charter to work alongside the English Sports Council:

Ministerial Nominees to the Regions of the English Sports Council

North

Sam Stoker

John O'Connor

Yorkshire and Humberside

David Oxley

John Walsh

North West

Jim Cochrane

Professor John Last

Rick Parry

Philip Marsden

West Midlands

Jim Munn

Eastern

Patrick Whittingdale

Andrew Chance

William Bleakley

London

Ramon Subba Row

Dane Rawlins

Richard Nunneley

Nicholas True

South East

Robbie Brown-Clayton

Kay Burley

Southern

Phyllis Avery

Ralph Dellor

Jacqueline Smithson

Bob Phillis

David Collier

South West

Dennis Silk

National Lottery (Interest Receipts)

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what interest was received in 1995 by the Treasury for national lottery funds it holds for distribution to each of the commissions with responsibilities for the allocation of funds to individual projects. [40041]

Mr. Sproat: None. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible for the national lottery distribution fund and interest on funds not yet drawn down by the distributing bodies accrue to the NLDF itself for the benefit of the good causes.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what interest was received in 1995–96 by Camelot for national lottery funds it holds for distribution to each of the commissions with responsibilities for the allocation of funds to individual projects. [40040]

Mr. Sproat: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the interest received in 1995–96 on funds held prior to such allocation and payment in respect of each of the commissions set up for the distribution of national lottery funds allocated to individual projects. [40042]

Mr. Sproat: Interest gains on moneys held in the national lottery distribution fund were £66,416,000 for 1995–96.

War Memorials

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her policy with respect to the removal of or change of site of war memorials *(a)* throughout the country and *(b)* in the district local authority area of Stafford district council. [40005]

Mr. Sproat: My Department's interest in war memorials relates to whether they are statutorily protected as scheduled ancient monuments or listed buildings. In such cases, under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, scheduled monument or listed building consent would be required for their resiting or removal. Applications for scheduled monument and listed building consent are made to the Secretary of State for National Heritage and the local planning authority respectively. Any such applications would be considered in the light of the policies set out in planning policy guidance notes 15 and 16.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the constituencies she has visited in the past three months on official business and the constituencies she intends to visit in the next three months; and if she will make a statement. [34358]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In the three months to 20 June, I visited the following constituencies on official business: Battersea; Brent, North; Brighton, Kemptown;

Brighton, Pavilion; Cambridge; City of London and Westminster, South; Croydon, North-West; Ellesmere Port and Neston; Guildford; Hackney, South and Shoreditch; Hampstead and Highgate; Islington, South and Finsbury; Islington, North; Kensington; Liverpool Riverside; Southwark and Bermondsey; Staffordshire Moorlands; Stratford-on-Avon; Twickenham; Vauxhall; Watford; Westbury; and Worthing.

It is not normal practice to make public details of forward diaries.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many visits (i) she and (ii) her Ministers made to *(a)* the Newbury constituency and *(b)* other constituencies in the last 12 months. [39873]

Mr. Sproat: No Minister in the Department of National Heritage has visited the Newbury constituency in the last 12 months.

A full breakdown of visits that Ministers in the Department of National Heritage have made to other constituencies could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Channel 5

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the parliamentary constituencies in which *(a)* no reception and *(b)* partial reception of the channel 5 television service will be available. [39741]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to the right hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Vehicles (Traffic Violations)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the number of traffic violations involving departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39304]

Mr. Sproat: My Department owns no vehicles. Of my two agencies a departmental vehicle of Historic Royal Palaces was issued with a parking ticket in 1993. The fine was £20.

Millennium Exhibition

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a progress report on the plans for the millennium exhibition funding. [39785]

Mr. Sproat: The Millennium Commission, which is responsible for the organisation and funding of the millennium exhibition, is making satisfactory progress. My right hon. Friend will reply to the hon. Member in her capacity as chairman of the commission setting out the current position in more detail, placing copies of her response in the Libraries of the House.

Licences

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the licences issued by her Department; for what purpose they are issued; and what are the administrative costs for each. [38676]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* My Department issues only one licence. This is used to permit the legal export of cultural objects from the UK. The administrative costs are not available.

HEALTH

Nurses (Cheshire)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of nurses employed by the health authorities in Cheshire for each of the last five years; and what was the national average number of nurses employed by health authorities in each of those years. [36492]

Mr. Horam: The information is shown in the table. Figures in the table represent nursing and midwifery staff employed by district health authorities and, therefore, do not include staff employed by national health service trusts.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS) Nursing and Midwifery Staff (excluding Agency) employed by District Health Authorities (DHAs) in Cheshire and the Average Number of Nursing and Midwifery Staff employed by Health Authorities in England at 30 September 1990 to 1994

Whole-time equivalents

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Chester DHA	2,050	1,720	1,570	760	150
Crewe DHA	1,950	1,100	810	[1]—	n/a
Halton DHA	560	360	320	[1]—	n/a
Macclesfield DHA	1,360	1,270	1,240	[1]—	n/a
Warrington DHA	2,110	1,810	1,930	[1]—	n/a
South-east Cheshire DHA	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	[1]—
North Cheshire DHA	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	[1]—
Average number (wte) of nursing and midwifery staff in English district health authorities	2,050	1,820	1,430	850	170

Notes:

Nursing and midwifery staff working in directly managed units are employees of DHAs. Nurses employed by Trusts are not included.

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10, consequently totals may not equal sum of components due to rounding.

[1] Denotes 5 or less.

n/a = not applicable.

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.

Negligence

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information the national health service litigation authority has compiled or is compiling on medical negligence cases and claims. [37332]

Mr. Horam: The national health service litigation authority compiles such information as it deems to be necessary to carry out its delegated functions.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a list of trusts in each region which *(a)* have and *(b)* have not subscribed to the clinical negligence scheme for trusts, indicating the cost of each annual premium. [37331]

Mr. Horam: An updated list of members and non-members of the clinical negligence scheme for trusts will be placed in the Library. The scheme is voluntary and is open to all national health service trusts in England. The clinical negligence scheme for trusts represents a pooling arrangement between trusts which is in its first year of operation. Until the scheme has had an opportunity to mature it would not be appropriate to give details of the contribution of individual trusts.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *44*, if he will publish the latest information on clinical negligence claims settled by individual trusts. [37442]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a list showing the number, nature and value of contracts awarded by his Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton, BDO Stoy Hayward, Pannell Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996. [37327]

Mr. Horam: Information regarding the number of contracts awarded by this Department is not available centrally. The total sums paid those firms listed in 1995–96 are as follows:

	1995–96 £
Coopers and Lybrand	nil
KPMG	620,110
Price Waterhouse	97,932
Ernst and Young	nil
Deloitte and Touche	63,150
Arthur Andersen	nil
Grant Thornton	nil
BDO Stoy Hayward	42,000
Pannell Kerr Forster	nil
Robson Rhodes	nil

NHS Litigation Authority

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the members and occupations of the litigation authority and place in the Library all declarations of interests they have made. [37333]

Mr. Horam: The national health service litigation authority currently has two members: the chairman, Sir Bruce Martin QC, who is a company chairman, and Mr. Ron Bradshaw, a solicitor. An exercise to appoint additional members is currently under way. Declarations of interests for all members will be available from the litigation authority.

HIV (Drug Therapy)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether two or three drug combination therapy for those with HIV is approved for support within *(a)* the GP prescribing scheme and *(b)* hospital trust pharmacies, and if he will make a statement. [37564]

Mr. Horam: Where different drug regimes are available, it is a matter for general practitioners to discuss with patients and decide on the best form of treatment. Likewise, hospital clinicians prescribe medicines to meet patients' clinical needs, and these are supplied by the hospital pharmacy. Unlicensed drugs can be prescribed on a named patient basis. No specific instructions have been issued on drug combination therapies for HIV, but the Department recommends developing local strategies for the managed entry of new medicines into the national health service, making use of evidence of their clinical and cost effectiveness.

Pharmaceutical Services

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy for the future of independent community pharmacists. [38013]

Mr. Malone: Community pharmacists play an important part in the primary care team. We are committed to using their skills more effectively in a wider role.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list those dispensing companies with more than 10 outlets and the number of prescriptions each of those companies dispensed in each year since 1990; [38011]

(2) what proportion of prescriptions were dispensed by independent pharmacists or companies with fewer than 10 outlets in each year since 1990. [38012]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Hospitals (Joint Ventures)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many joint ventures are currently established between the NHS and the private sector in hospitals covering the Greater London area; and if he will list each project and hospital involved. [37858]

Mr. Horam: There are eight schemes currently completed or under way in the Greater London area—London boroughs included—that have gone forward under the private finance initiative. A number of other joint ventures are established for schemes which have not yet had full business case approval. Information is shown in the table.

PFI schemes with a capital value of £1 million or more in the Greater London Area

Trust	*Scheme*	*Status*
Brent and Harrow Health Authority	Residential accommodation for elderly mentally ill	Complete
Central Middlesex NHS Trust	Ambulatory Care and Diagnostic Centre	FBC approved
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow Health Agency	Office accommodation	Complete
Enfield and Haringey Health Authority	Office accommodation	Complete
Havering Hospitals NHS Trust	Estates services	Under way
Hillingdon Health Agency	Office accommodation	Complete
King's Healthcare NHS Trust	Clinical waste incinerator	Complete
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Health Authority	Office accommodation	Complete
West Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust	Endoscopy Unit	Complete

PFI schemes with a capital value of £1 million or more in the Greater London Area

Trust	*Scheme*	*Status*
Barking, Havering and Brentwood Community NHS Trust	Reprovision of acute psychiatric services	ITN issued
Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust	Rationalisation onto Farnborough Hospital site	ITN issued
Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust	Development/conversion of QEII Hospital	ITN issued
Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust	Consolidation of specialist acute services	ITN issued
King's Healthcare NHS Trust	Centralisation onto Denmark Hill Site	ITN issued
Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	Redevelopment of City and East London acute services	ITN issued
University College London Hospitals NHS Trust	Consolidation of acute services onto University site	ITN issued
Welihouse NHS Trust	Barnet General Hospital	ITN issued

Key:
FBC = full business case.
ITN = invitation to negotiate.

Disease Research

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what public funds were spent in the last financial year on research to find a treatment or cure for *(a)* AIDS, *(b)* cancer, *(c)* heart disease and *(d)* Alzheimer's disease per victim of that disease. [37891]

Mr. Horam: Information is not available to produce comparable estimates of research expenditure per individual.

Hospital Building Projects

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new NHS hospital building projects are currently being carried out in England and Wales; and for how many funding has been allocated. [37859]

Mr. Horam: There are currently 70 major national health service building projects under construction in England. Information on minor schemes is not available centrally.

Funding must be secured prior to any project being approved.

Doctors (Early Retirement)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each of the last 10 years the number of NHS doctors who (i) applied for retirement on grounds of ill health, (ii) were successful in such applications without resorting to appeal, (iii) were unsuccessful and *(a)* appealed and *(b)* were successful on appeal and (iv) retired early by staff grade; if he will estimate the annual cost of these early retirements in terms of payments made to former NHS doctors prior to their normal retirement age; and if he will make a statement on the retirement rate for NHS doctors on grounds of ill health relative to other similar professionals. [38029]

Mr. Malone: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the National Health Service Pensions Agency under its chief executive, Mr. A. F. Cowan. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from A. F. Cowan to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 22 July 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question as it falls within my area of responsibility.

The only information readily available on ill-health retirement for specific categories of NHS employees is derived from the Government Actuary's Department quinquennial valuation of the Pension Scheme. Unfortunately it does not provide a yearly breakdown.

Figures in respect of doctors retiring on the grounds of ill-health are:

Doctors—early retirement due to ill-health

1985–1989	*1990–1994*
554	748

These statistics relate to successful applications where ill-health retirement was granted. No information is gathered about unsuccessful applications by employment type.

Water Tower Mental Hospitals

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 June, *Official Report*, column *111*, whether the national survey by the NHS executive of the water tower mental hospitals in England will provide the same information as the previous surveys conducted for the mental health task force. [38434]

Mr. Malone: The survey will be conducted by the national health service executive regional offices. It will provide information on water tower hospitals in the context of health authority plans whereas the review commissioned by the mental health task force collected information on a trust-by-trust basis.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the last 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39140]

Mr. Horam: The Government recognise the crucial role played by small firms in the United Kingdom economy and aim to help them by providing sound economic conditions—keeping inflation and interest rates low; reducing legislative administrative and taxation burdens; and where appropriate provide direct assistance in the form of specialist advice and support and easing access to finance.

In October 1995 the Department appointed a small business Minister who continues to be actively involved in the various measures being taken forward across government by the small business Ministers' initiative.

The Department has created a new sponsorship branch to deal with the health care medical systems industry, which is dominated by small businesses, and has begun a regular series of meetings with the lead trade association to identify those issues which need to be addressed if the industry is to maintain its competitive performance.

The Department is particularly sensitive to the effect of new regulations on business, especially small businesses. It is taking action to stem the flow of new regulations and to make sure that those that are

introduced are better regulations. We have promoted a sensitive approach to small businesses on food safety enforcement matters. This has included issuing guidance to local authorities and, recently, making an order under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 to provide new rights of representation and a period of notice before certain enforcement action is taken. On 15 September 1995, 12 sets of regulations were replaced with two for general food hygiene and temperature controls. Temperature controls provide for significant potential savings in the food industry, which includes many small businesses. Two regional small business panels have been set up to act as sounding board for small food businesses.

Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was *(a)* the total number of persons, *(b)* persons aged under 16, *(c)* persons aged 16 to 64, *(d)* persons aged 65 to 74 and *(e)* persons aged over 65 years who were provided with (i) telephones and attachments, (ii) telephone rentals and (iii) other services by local authorities for the year ended 31 March 1995 under the terms of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970; and if he will provide this information by (1) county councils, (2) metropolitan districts, (3) inner London boroughs, (4) outer London boroughs and (5) in total. [38910]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Smoke Alarms

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will encourage the free distribution of smoke alarms by health visitors and community care organisations. [38912]

Mr. Malone: Safety in the home is something which all agencies concerned with community care seek to promote. Fire precautions specifically, however, are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Accident Survivors

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission a study into factors affecting help-seeking behaviour in survivors of accidents with psychological trauma symptoms; and if he will make a statement. [39228]

Mr. Malone: No. The factors affecting help-seeking behaviour by survivors of trauma are many and varied. In each individual case, referral for specialist help is a matter for each patient and his or her general practitioner. Many non-national health service and other organisations provide valuable assistance in this area and complement that which is provided in the NHS.

Tamoxifen

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission a study into adjuvant Tamoxifen treatment; and if he will make a statement. [39206]

Mr. Horam: The Department has no such plans. At least 20 studies have been undertaken into adjuvant Tamoxifen treatment for breast cancer in this country and abroad since 1994.

ALFINN Study

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission research into an ALFINN study; and if he will make a statement. [39207]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

Drugs

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission a study into an extended access programme for 3TC1; and if he will make a statement. [39208]

Mr. Horam: We do not run extended access programmes in the United Kingdom but clinicians can approach manufacturers of unlicensed drugs, such as 3TC—lamivudine—to request permission to prescribe the drug for named patients.

Commissioned Research

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will commission double-blind, multi-centre, randomised, parallel group study on the effect of varying dosages and frequency of the use of Colofac; and if he will make a statement; [39209]

(2) if he will commission a study into a double-blind, randomised, parallel group, placebo-controlled, multi-centre to evaluate the efficacy of Lexipafant (BB-882) in patients with acute pancreatitis; and if he will make a statement; [39220]

(3) if he will commission a study into Famotidine as a treatment for nocturnal heartburn; and if he will make a statement; [39211]

(4) if he will commission a randomised, double-blind, parallel group multi-centre study to compare Ranitidine Bismuth CXitrate (GC311) 400 mg bd in combination with either *(a)* clarithromycin 250 mg qds or *(b)* 500 mg bd for the eradication of Helicobacter pylori with duodenal ulcer; and if he will make a statement; [39213]

(5) if he will commission a study, into the relationship biochemical properties, biochemical composition and the ultrastructural organisation of human articular cartilage; and if he will make a statement. [39219]

Mr. Malone: There are no plans at present to commission these studies. Research commissioned within the Department's policy research programme is set out in "Centrally Commissioned Research Programme" and "Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commissions 1994/95", copies of which are available in the Library.

Pressure Ulcers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission a study into the effects of IodoflexR versus IntraSiteR gel in the treatment of pressure ulcers; and if he will make a statement. [39210]

Mr. Malone: The Department of Health, and the Medical Research Council, which is the main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research, normally commission studies which compare the effectiveness of a broad range of possible treatments and interventions. The Department and the MRC are, however, always willing to consider soundly based scientific proposals in competition with other applications.

St. Ann's Hospital

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reports he has received about patients sleeping on the floor at St. Ann's hospital in north London. [39258]

Mr. Malone: A recent Mental Health Act Commission report on a visit to St. Ann's hospital criticised Haringey Healthcare NHS trust for the inappropriate use of seclusion rooms. The trust has now addressed this problem and patients no longer use the seclusion rooms as temporary bedrooms.

General Practice

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the extension of the NHS performance guide to include general practices. [39268]

Mr. Malone: The 1995–96 NHS performance guide includes information on four primary care indicators at health authority level. We have no plans to extend the NHS performance guide to include figures for individual practices.

NHS Board Members

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses are on the board of *(a)* the NHS executive and *(b)* the NHS policy board. [39272]

Mr. Malone: The national health service director of nursing, Mrs. Yvonne Moores, is a member of both the NHS executive and the NHS policy boards.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many executive and non-executive directors of health authorities are qualified nurses. [39271]

Mr. Malone: Information about the executive membership of health authorities is not available centrally. Our records show that 13 non-executive members of health authorities have a background in nursing.

Road Accidents (Children)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what (i) proposals he has and (ii) targets he set for reducing death and injuries to children on the road. [39280]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport on 23 July, *Official Report*, columns *139–40*.

Epilepsy

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission a multi-centre trial to assess the effect of a once-daily Epilim Chrono regimen in epileptic patients established on a twice-daily enteric-coated tablet regimen; and if he will make a statement. [39212]

Mr. Malone: The Department of Health, and the Medical Research Council, which is the main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research, normally commission studies which compare the effectiveness of a broad range of possible treatments and interventions. The Department and the MRC are, however, always willing to consider soundly based scientific proposals in competition with other applications.

The Department's health technology assessment programme intends to call for proposals for research comparing the effectiveness of new anti-epileptic drugs and existing therapies.

Blood Pressure

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission a study into *(a)* a comparison of patient self-measurement of blood pressure using automatic sphygmomanometers with general practitioner measurements and its relevance to therapeutics decision making and *(b)* general practitioner use of Coversyl as standard treatment; and if he will make a statement. [39214]

Mr. Horam: Clinical studies are normally matters for the Medical Research Council which receives it grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, and other bodies which fund clinical research.

Nurse Prescribing Scheme

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about progress on the nurse prescribing scheme. [39274]

Mr. Malone: The nurse prescribing trial was extended on 1 April 1996 to a further 60 general practitioner sites in Bolton. The evaluation of the original eight pilot sites will be published in the autumn. The extended pilot will be evaluated separately, with a report due in late 1997.

Consultant Psychiatrists

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of consultant psychiatrist vacancies. [39260]

Mr. Malone: The available information is contained in the Department of Health annual medical and dental work force census, 30 September 1994, copies of which are available in the Library.

Teenage Mothers

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the proportion of teenagers having babies in each EU country. [39259]

Mr. Horam: The fertility rates per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 for 1990, the most recent year for which comparable data are available, are shown in the table.

	Fertility rate
England and Wales	33.3
Scotland	31.9
Northern Ireland	29.3

	Fertility rate
Portugal	24.6
Greece	21.8
Austria	21.3
Republic of Ireland	16.2
Sweden	14.1
Spain	13.4
Finland	12.4
West Germany	11.6
Italy	9.8
Belgium	9.3
Denmark	9.1
France	8.8
Netherlands	6.4
Luxembourg	no data

Source:
Population Trends No. 74.

Hospital Bedside Televisions

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average charge to patients for bedside televisions in NHS hospitals. [39269]

Mr. Horam: Arrangements and charges for optional personal bedside television are a local management matter on which information is not available centrally.

Nurses (Redundancies)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses have been made redundant under his initiative to reduce manage nent levels. [39273]

Mr. Malone: The information is not available centrally.

Emergency Bed Service (London)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of the London emergency bed service in each of the last five years; and what were the sources of its budget. [39279]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Assaults on NHS Staff

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS staff have been assaulted on NHS premises in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [39267]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Oral Contraceptives

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission an open-label, multi-centre study to determine the efficacy and safety of a 24-day regimen of monophasic oral contraceptive preparation of gestodene 6µg and ethinyl estradion 15µg; and if he will make a statement. [39217]

Mr. Malone: We have no plans to do so.

Mental Health Tribunals

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken since March with regard to the constitution of mental health tribunals. [39244]

Mr. Malone: None.

NHS Doctors

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* GPs and *(b)* hospital doctors are currently in post in the NHS. [39823]

Mr. Malone: There were 26,702 unrestricted principals in England on 1 October 1995 and there were 44,660 whole-time equivalent hospital doctors on 30 September 1994.

Pisces Project

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what arrangements were made to advertise the Pisces project in the contract supplement of the *Official Journal* of the EU; [39807]

(2) if he will list the cost of the Track software acquired for the Pisces project from the Intelligent Office Company Ltd. of Hammersmith and the process by which it was selected; [39799]

(3) what was the original estimated cost of the Pisces project; and what is his latest estimate of the outturn cost; [39809]

(4) if he will list the methods used to select the project manager for Pisces; [39808]

(5) if he will list the principal expected benefits from the Pisces project and the years in which they were expected to arise. [39810]

Mr. Horam: The Pisces project is an initiative of Liverpool health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman for details.

Airborne Particulates

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the link between airborne particulates and premature death; [39553]

(2) what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the potential beneficial effects of reducing airborne particulate levels in urban areas; [39554]

(3) what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the link between airborne particulate levels and asthma. [39556]

Mr. Horam: In November 1995 the Department of Health published a report of the expert advisory Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants, "Non-Biological Particles and Health", copies of which are in the Library.

Further research has been commissioned under the joint Department of Health, Department of the Environment and Medical Research Council research strategy on air pollution and respiratory disease.

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of airborne particulates his Department currently assesses to be safe. [39555]

Mr. Horam: The Department of the Environment's expert panel on air quality standards, to which this Department contributes, has made a recommendation for an air quality standard for particulates (PM_{10}) in the United Kingdom of 50 µg/m³, measured as a 24-hour running average. The panel considered that very few individuals in the population will react adversely to this concentration of particles.

Health Authorities (Invoices)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average number of invoices sent out by health authorities in the last year. [39747]

Mr. Horam: This information is not held centrally.

Dental Services

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many dental practices in each South Yorkshire metropolitan borough council accepted NHS patients in 1995; [39791]

(2) how many dental practices in each North Yorkshire borough council accepted NHS patients in 1995; [39793]

(3) how many dental practices in each Humberside borough council accepted NHS patients in 1995; [39792]

(4) how many dental practices in each West Yorkshire borough council accepted NHS patients in 1995. [39794]

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists claimed NHS fees in each of the last five years nationally and by region. [39826]

Mr. Malone: I will write to the hon. Members.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new NHS registrations with a dental practitioner occurred in each six-monthly period between January 1990 and January 1994 and in each month since January 1994; and how many of these are estimated to have been duplicate registrations. [38848]

Mr. Malone: The information available is shown in the table. It is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of how many of the additions to dentists' registers were duplicate registrations.

General Dental Service: additions to dentists' registers 1990–1996

England

	Adults	*Children*	*Total*
July–December 1990	6,465,031	2,263,895	8,728,926
January–June 1991	7,831,462	3,241,789	11,073,251
July–December 1991	5,183,990	1,746,359	6,930,349
January–June 1992	5,237,498	2,074,727	7,312,225
July–December 1992	4,440,845	1,465,821	5,906,666
January–June 1993	4,522,199	1,795,765	6,317,964
July–December 1993	4,111,603	1,344,462	5,456,065
1994			
January	870,893	383,089	1,253,982
February	801,985	352,813	1,154,798
March	733,962	295,643	1,029,605
April	794,696	305,957	1,100,653
May	789,391	288,878	1,078,269
June	706,418	255,740	962,158
July	713,735	239,208	952,943
August	743,716	269,302	1,013,018
September	799,398	265,990	1,065,388
October	781,429	268,198	1,049,627
November	667,813	223,276	891,089
December	620,948	169,663	790,611
1995			
January	877,115	384,094	1,261,209
February	760,316	335,200	1,095,516
March	726,532	311,851	1,038,383
April	712,238	279,152	991,390
May	757,928	286,419	1,044,347
June	679,884	249,911	929,795
July	703,433	248,729	952,162
August	738,928	272,790	1,011,718
September	749,902	256,289	1,006,191
October	712,630	248,142	960,772
November	620,966	221,928	842,894
December	693,125	197,632	890,757
1996			
January	786,674	357,550	1,144,224
February	661,091	328,154	989,245
March	702,332	308,334	1,010,666
April	674,820	285,726	960,546
May	696,760	271,527	968,287

Formal registration system came into operation in October 1990 with the beginning of the new dental contract.

Additions to registers include registration of patients after a break in attendance and reinstatement of registrations that have been cancelled in error. Additions also include transfers from one dentists to another, changes of surname, and patients being transferred from capitation to continuing care arrangements.

The date refers to the month in which the addition would have first appeared in the registration statistics. Payment is made a month in arrears.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients were registered with a dental practitioner in *(a)* April 1994, *(b)* April 1995 and *(c)* April 1996. [38847]

Mr. Malone: The information is set out in the table.

Number of patients registered with a National Health Service dentist at the end of April, 1994–96

	Number of patients registered		
	Adults	*Children*	*Total*
April 1994	21,447,217	6,916,912	28,364,129
April 1995	20,463,447	6,746,544	27,209,991
April 1996	19,782,487	6,786,617	26,569,104

1. Excludes patients registered with salaried dentists.

2. Since May 1994 the Dental Practice Board has improved procedures for eliminating duplicate registrations. This has produced downward pressure on the levels of registrations over this period.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of dentists in *(a)* Wiltshire and *(b)* Salisbury parliamentary constituency, in each of the last five years, who will treat (i) NHS patients only, (ii) NHS and private patients and (ii) private patients only; and if he will make a statement. [38984]

Mr. Malone: The information available in set out in the table.

General Dental Service: Number of dentists practising in Wiltshire Family Health Services Authority at 30 September

	Number of dentists at 30 September
1991	158
1992	173
1993	170
1994	175
1995	178

Includes principals on the Family Health Services Authority list for Wiltshire together with assistants and vocational trainees. Some principals may be on more than one Family Health Services Authority list; these dentists have been included where Wiltshire was the FHSA in which the dentist's fee income was greatest. Salaried dentists are excluded.

Single Tender Contracts

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is issued to civil servants regarding *(a)* their dealings with applicants for single tender contracts and *(b)* the provision of written advice to such applicants. [39815]

Mr. Horam: Guidance on single tender action is contained in two internal Department of Health publications, "Purchasing and Supply Manual" and "Guidance Notes on the use of Management Consultants".

The Department's policy is generally to avoid single tender action, but accepts that it may be justifiable in very limited circumstances, for example, where the work is an extension of a recently completed contract and it can be clearly demonstrated that this achieves better value for money or where the expertise required is available only from one source. Applicants are not advised that they are providing the sole tender.

NHS Number Programme

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the initial cost of the new NHS number programme; and what is the estimated cost to date and his latest estimated full outturn cost. [39771]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements were made to advertise the new NHS number programme in the contract supplement of the *Official Journal* of the EU. [39769]

Mr. Horam: The new national health service number programme has complied with the European Union regulations on procurement where these were applicable. The following contracts were advertised in the contract supplement of the *Official Journal* of the EU:

The contract for development of a new NHS central register

The contract for provision of a service to trace new NHS numbers

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date the new NHS number programme was submitted for Treasury approval; on what date such approval was granted; and on what date the project commenced. [39770]

Mr. Horam: The business case for the new NHS number was submitted for Treasury approval in March 1994. Approval was granted in April 1994, and the terms of reference for the programme were agreed by the new NHS number programme board in August 1994.

Hospitality Budgets

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the hospitality budget of his Department, the NHS executive and the regional offices hospitality budget for *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1995–96. [39832]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

PIMS Project

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements were made to advertise the PIMS—performance indicators for management systems—project in the contract supplement of the *Official Journal* of the EU. [39811]

Mr. Horam: The Department has framework agreements with a number of companies covering various categories of information technology work, which were awarded after an EC/GATT procurement. The contracts for the performance information management system were awarded following competitions between companies with framework agreements in appropriate categories.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date the performance indicators for the management systems project was submitted for Treasury approval; on what date such approval was granted; on what date the project commenced; and at what estimated cost. [39813]

Mr. Horam: Performance indicators for management systems commenced in November 1994 at an estimated cost within departmental delegated limits. Treasury approval has not therefore been necessary.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what independent evaluation there has been of the expected benefits of the PIMS project as to volume standard and time scale. [39812]

Mr. Horam: These topics are covered in post-implementation reviews, which are carried out at the end of major information technology projects. They are conducted by independent companies drawn from those with which the Department has framework agreements. PIMS is still under development and a PIR is not yet appropriate.

Mental Health

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the NHS budget was spent on mental health care in each of the last five years, nationally and by region. [39727]

Mr. Malone: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients compulsorily detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 are currently residing in hospitals for the mentally handicapped. [39733]

Mr. Malone: In 1994–95, the latest year for which information is currently available, there were 304 formal admissions of patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 and classified as mentally impaired or severely mentally impaired.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if patients compulsorily detained on hospital sites under the Mental Health Act 1983 are allowed to mix with mentally handicapped patients residing in the same hospital. [39732]

Mr. Malone: The Mental Health Act 1983 does not prescribe such matters for those detained under its powers.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many formal admissions of patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 there were by health authority in each year between 1990–91 and 1994–95. [39761]

Mr. Malone: I will write to the hon. Member.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mental health beds there were in the NHS in each of the last five years. [39728]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply by my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), gave the hon. Member of Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) on 29 February, *Official Report*, columns *687–89*.

Prescribed Drugs

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost to the NHS of prescribed drugs dispensed *(a)* through a general practitioner dispensary and *(b)* in a pharmacy. [39751]

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table.

Average net ingredient cost per prescription, 1995

England

Prescriptions dispensed by	*Average net ingredient cost per prescription fee* £
Dispensing doctors	7.38
Community pharmacists and appliance contractors	7.65

1. The data are from the Prescription Pricing Authority PD1 series of forms and prescriptions are based on fees.

2. The net ingredient cost refers to the cost of the drug before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs or fees.

Lung Cancer

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued on the maximum waiting time for treatment of lung cancer. [39828]

Mr. Horam: It is not appropriate to have a maximum waiting time for treatment of lung cancer. Each case is different and it must be for doctors to decide when treatment should be provided. Patients are placed on a waiting list only if, in the opinion of a clinician at the time of assessment, their condition is judged to be stable.

Extra-contractual Referrals

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost of administering the extra-contractual referrals system in each of the last 10 years. [39845]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many extra-contractual referrals there have been in each of the last 10 years; [39844]

(2) how many extra-contractual referrals were made in the last year *(a)* by trust, *(b)* regionally and *(c)* nationally. [39746]

Mr. Malone: Information on the numbers of extra-contractual referrals is not available centrally. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 11 July, *Official Report*, column *274*, for information on the value of extra-contractual referrals for all available years.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those trusts in South Yorkshire which have not to date signed contracts with their local authorities. [39795]

Mr. Horam: All health authorities in South Yorkshire have signed health care contracts with national health service trusts in South Yorkshire.

Hospital Services

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* hospital units and *(b)* accident and emergency units there were in each year since 1979. [39819]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

"Primary Care—The Future"

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners, managers and nurses he has consulted in the course of the listening exercise "Primary Care—The Future". [39759]

Mr. Malone: The range and variety of consultation are outlined in the annexe to "Primary Care: The Future", published on 10 June 1996, copies of which were placed in the Library.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the newspaper article sent to him by the right hon. Member for Worthing in respect of the waiting lists for patients of *(a)* fundholding general practitioners and *(b)* non-fundholding general practitioners. [39630]

Mr. Malone: I will write to my right hon. Friend.

GP Pharmacies

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the practice of general practitioners converting their dispensaries into pharmacies. [39749]

Mr. Malone: It is open to a dispensing doctor to apply to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain to register his premises as a pharmacy. He would need to meet legal and ethical requirements such as the availability of a pharmacist whenever pharmaceutical services were being provided.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dispensing general practices there were in each of the last five years. [39750]

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table.

Dispensing General Practices 1992–95 in England

	Number of dispensing general practices
1995	1,214
1994	1,212
1993	1,202
1992	1,197

Source:
Derived from General Medical Services Census October 1992–1995.
Note:
Data on number of dispensing practices for 1991 are incomplete and unreliable.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on patients' preferences in relation to the dispensing of NHS prescriptions from (i) a general practitioner dispensary and (ii) a pharmacy. [39752]

Mr. Malone: None.

Memphis Project

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date the Memphis project was submitted for Treasury approval; on what date such approval was granted; and on what date the project commenced and at what estimated cost. [39817]

Mr. Horam: The Memphis project commenced in 1994 and was completed in August 1995. The cost was within departmental delegated limits. Treasury approval was therefore unnecessary.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of the Track software and acquired for the Memphis project from the Intelligent Office Company Ltd. of Hammersmith; and if he will give details of the competitive tendering procedure used in the acquisition of the Track software for the Memphis project. [39800]

Mr. Horam: The cost of the software is subject to commercial confidentiality. It was procured from a company through one of the Department's EC/GATT contracts.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements were made to advertise the Memphis project in the contract supplement of the *Official Journal* of the EU. [39816]

Mr. Horam: The Department has framework agreements with a number of companies covering various categories of information technology work, which were awarded after an EC/GATT procurement. The contracts for Memphis were awarded following competitions between companies with framework agreements in appropriate categories.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what independent evaluation there has been of the expected benefits of the Memphis project as to volume, standard and time scale. [39814]

Mr. Horam: These topics are covered in post-implementation reviews, which are carried out at the end of major information technology projects. They are conducted by independent companies drawn from those with which the Department has framework agreements. A PIR was carried out at the end of the Memphis project.

Leukaemia (Newbury)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies *(a)* are taking place and *(b)* he proposes into levels of leukaemia and related disorders in the Newbury district. [39717]

Mr. Horam: The Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment—COMARE—has considered allegations of increased incidence of childhood cancer around a number of nuclear establishments. Its third report considered whether there was any association in local childhood cancer incidence in west Berkshire and north Hampshire and exposure to radioactivity from the nuclear establishments which were then known as the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, Aldermaston, the Royal Ordnance factory, Burghfield, and the Atomic Energy Research Establishment, Harwell. The report did not include RAF Greenham Common.

In this report COMARE recommended that a study on the geographical distribution of childhood cancer incidence on a nationwide basis should be carried out. This study is currently under way and COMARE will consider all new data now available in assessing whether there is an association between local levels of contamination and cancer incidence.

Breast Lumps

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has issued on the setting up of one-stop clinics for the treatment of breast lumps. [39834]

Mr. Horam: Guidance for purchasers on improving outcomes in breast cancer will be issued shortly. It will be for health authorities in consultation with their provider units to agree assessment, treatment and care arrangements for women with breast symptoms.

GP Fundholders

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the total savings of GP fundholders in the last year. [39729]

Mr. Malone: Final audited information for 1995–96 is not yet available.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total cost of staff, equipment, computing and management costs in respect of GP fundholding practices in the last year. [39730]

Mr. Malone: Audited information is not available.

NHS Expenditure

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the amount of money reported by each health authority in England to his Department as its outturn spend for 1995–96 and its planned spend for 1996–97 in respect of *(a)* in-patient case for mental illness, *(b)* out-patient care for mental illness, *(c)* residential care for mental illness, *(d)* day care for mental illness, *(e)* community nursing care for mental illness, *(f)* in-patient care for learning disability, *(g)* out-patient care for learning disability, *(h)* residential care for learning disability, (i) day care for learning disability and *(j)* community nursing care for learning disability. [39830]

Mr. Malone: This information is not yet available.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 2 July, *Official Report,* column *367,* how many highly suspect cases of the new strain of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease have been reported to the national surveillance unit in Edinburgh *(a)* up to the end of 1995, *(b)* in the quarter ending 31 March 1996 and *(c)* in the quarter ending 30 June 1996. [39846]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 23 July, *Official Report,* column *215,* which explained that the term "highly suspect case" is not used in respect of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. There are now 12 confirmed cases of the new variant of CJD. Of these, three died in 1995, five in the first quarter of 1996 and three in the second; one patient is still alive.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the incubation period for *(a)* the normal strain as reported conventionally world wide, *(b)* the strain accidentally caused by pituitary hormone treatment and *(c)* the new strain reported on 20 March for CJD. [39843]

Mr. Horam: The vast majority of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease are sporadic and occur spontaneously. It is not possible to ascertain how long a patient may have been incubating the disease before the clinical signs become evident. Studies of the Kuru epidemic in New Guinea showed incubation periods of between five and 30 years. In cases of iatrogenic infection incubation periods have varied from 18 months for central exposures to 25 years for peripheral exposures. The incubation time for the new variant of CJD is uncertain but is likely to be in the range of five to 20 years.

Single-sex Wards

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of single-sex wards as a percentage of the total in each of the last six years. [39821]

Mr. Horam: This information is not collected centrally.

Trust Hospitals (Invoices)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average number of invoices sent out by trust hospitals in the last year. [39745]

Mr. Horam: This information is not held centrally.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many visits (i) he and (ii) his Ministers made to *(a)* the Newbury constituency and *(b)* other constituencies in the last 12 months. [39870]

Mr. Horam: Since October 1995 no visits have been made to the Newbury constituency by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State or his ministerial colleagues. There have been 29 visits to other constituencies by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and 199 visits by his ministerial colleagues.

General Practice Audit

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers the Audit Commission have to audit general practice. [39748]

Mr. Horam: Auditors appointed by the Audit Commission have powers to examine all general practice records necessary to validate national health service income and expenditure.

Community Pharmacists

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS community pharmacists there were in each of the last five years. [39825]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) on 17 June, *Official Report,* columns *352-53.*

Young Runaways

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the Centrepoint National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children report "Nowhere to Hide: Giving Young Runaways a Voice", a copy of which has been sent to him; and what proposals he has to address the problem for young runaways. [39651]

Mr. Malone: A copy of the published report has not yet been received. I shall consider the recommendations when I receive them.

Health Authority Programme

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what business case and option appraisal was carried out prior to the decision to commence the new health authority programme; and what is the estimated outturn cost of the new health authority programme. [39772]

Mr. Horam: Family Health Systems supplies the software to which modifications are needed in order for existing family health services authority based databases to operate effectively within new health authority boundaries. This work can be carried out only by the supplier; therefore no business case is required. The maximum estimated cost of this work is £1.4 million.

Modifications to the national health service central register will be needed in order for it to handle realigned databases. This work has yet to commence but a preliminary estimate of costs is that £300,000 will be required. The project initiation process will include more detailed consideration of costs and options.

Abortions

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give a breakdown by the procedure adopted of the number of abortions performed in the NHS South Thames region in the latest year for which figures are available. [39777]

Mr. Horam: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Hospital Emergency Admissions

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many emergency admissions to hospitals there were in each of the last four quarters. [39833]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

Diabetes (Syringes)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the availability on prescription of needles for pen-type syringes for diabetes; and what consultations he has had recently concerning their inclusion on the prescription list. [39849]

Mr. Malone: We are considering representations on this matter which have been made by the British Diabetic Association.

Breast Cancer

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the waiting time for breast cancer surgery at St. Bartholomew's hospital, London. [39828]

Mr. Malone: This is a matter for the Royal Hospitals national health service trust.

Trent RHA (Compensation)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful claims for compensation have been made against the Trent regional health authority during each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [39796]

Mr. Horam: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Practice Managers

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* practice managers and *(b)* practice administrative staff there were in each of the last five years. [39820]

Mr. Malone: The available information is contained in "Statistics for General Medical Practitioners in England 1985–1995 Bulletin 96/6 May 1996", copies of which are available in the Library.

Medical Audit

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was *(a)* his Department's and *(b)* the NHS executive's budget for medical audit in (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96 and (iii) 1996–97. [39760]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the reasons for the delay in publishing the health technology assessment project on cost-effectiveness of magnetic resonance imaging in the district general hospital; when he plans to publish it; and if he will make a statement. [39628]

Mr. Horam: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Computer Projects

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the computer projects currently being *(a)* developed and *(b)* administered by the NHS executive and the cost to date of each and the latest estimated final outturn cost. [39818]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

Greenham Common (Radiation)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the investigation by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment into the incidence of childhood cancer in the West Berkshire and North Hampshire area was informed of the 1961 report by Cripps and Stimson into radiation around the Greenham air base. [39877]

Mr. Horam: The Cripps and Stimson report of July 1961 was not included in the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment investigation into the incidence of childhood cancer in the west Berkshire and north Hampshire area. This investigation, the results of which were published in COMARE's third report in 1989, was specifically related to the nuclear installations which were then known as the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, Aldermaston, the Royal Ordnance factory, Burghfield, and the Atomic Energy Research Establishment, Harwell.

South Manchester University Hospital

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 19 July, *Official Report*, column *727*, for what reasons he was unable to specify the fees paid by South Manchester University Hospital NHS trust to the Audit Commission; and if he will make a statement. [39625]

Mr. Horam: The trust has paid no fees to the Audit Commission.

Birth Rate

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the causes of current birth rate levels. [39831]

Mr. Horam: Birth data for 1996 are currently being processed by the Office for National Statistics and will not be published until later next year.

Smoking-related Diseases

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people died from smoking-related diseases in each of the last five years. [39822]

Mr. Horam: It is estimated that in the United Kingdom about 110,000 deaths each year are smoking related.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost, assumed in the budget, of people employed full time or part time to work on the press and the media in 1996–97. [39975]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

Administration of Radioactive Substances Advisory Committee

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the membership of the Administration of Radioactive Substances Advisory Committee. [40009]

Mr. Horam: The committee is chaired by Professor James McKillop, Muirhead Professor of Medicine at the University Department of Medicine, Glasgow. The 19 members are:

Dr. Paul Abram, N. Ireland Centre for Clinical Oncology, Belfast (Clinical Oncology);

Dr. Muriel Buxton-Thomas, King's College Hospital, London (Nuclear Medicine);

Dr. Helen Carty, Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital (Clinical Radiology);

Dr. Susan Clarke, Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital, London (Nuclear Medicine);

Dr. Tony Coakley, Kent and Canterbury Hospital (Nuclear Medicine);

Dr. Malcolm Frier, University Hospital, Nottingham (Radiopharmacy);

Dr. Chris Gibson, Glan Clwyd Hospital, Rhyll (Physics);

Dr. Gerry Gillen, Stobhill Hospital, Glasgow (Physics);

Dr. Michael Henk, Royal Marsden Hospital, London (Clinical Oncology);

Dr. Stuart Hesselwood, City Hospital, Birmingham (Radiopharmacy);

Dr. Stephen Mather, St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London (Radiopharmacy);

Professor Ralph McCready, Royal Marsden Hospital, Sutton (Nuclear Medicine);

Dr. Peter Mountford, Royal Infirmary, Stoke on Trent (Physics);

Dr. Tom Nunan, Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital, London (Nuclear Medicine);

Dr. Mary Prescott, Manchester Royal Infirmary (Nuclear Medicine);

Dr. John Stather, National Radiological Protection Board (Radiobiology);

Dr. Wendy Tindale, Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield (Physics);

Dr. Derek Waller, Southampton General Hospital (Clinical Pharmacology);

Mr. John Watkinson, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham (Surgery).

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to advertise for membership of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. [40010]

Mr. Horam: There will be a number of vacancies in membership of the authority later this year. We are considering how best to ensure that applications for these vacancies are invited from as wide a field as possible of suitable people. This is likely to include advertising in the national press.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to make available the management statement agreed with the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. [40011]

Mr. Horam: Copies of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's management statement have today been placed in the Library.

Bristol Royal Infirmary

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set up an inquiry into the delivery of paediatric cardiac surgical services at Bristol royal infirmary between 1990 and 1995. [40018]

Mr. Dorrell: I am aware of the concerns surrounding the provision of paediatric cardiac surgery at the United Bristol hospital trust. A number of steps have been taken at local level to address those concerns.

I understand that the General Medical Council is now considering whether to take formal proceedings in this case. In the light of its decision I shall consider whether any further action is justified.

Professions Supplementary to Medicine

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made with the review of the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act 1960. [40019]

Mr. Horam: We have received a report of an independent review of the 1960 Act, copies of which have been placed in the Library. We welcome the report, and support its conclusion that new legislation is needed to streamline existing arrangements. We intend to prepare and consult widely on draft legislation based on the broad principles it establishes.

HIV Prevention

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring is in place to ensure that HIV prevention money is being targeted at those communities most affected throughout the United Kingdom. [38312]

Mr. Horam: In England monitoring of health authorities' HIV prevention funding is carried out by means of half-yearly reports on planned expenditure, with an outturn report at the end of the financial year for inclusion in each health authority's AIDS (Control) Act Report.

Guidance was issued to health authorities in March advising them of the need to allocate approximately 50 per cent. of the funds they receive for HIV prevention towards work with those populations most at risk from HIV.

Questions relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Terminally Ill Patients

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of *(a)* in-patient palliative care hospices and *(b)* Macmillan services in each region. [38844]

Mr. Horam: The total number of in-patient palliative care hospices and Macmillan services in each region is given in the table:

In-patient palliative care services as at January 1996

Region	*Number of units*
Anglia and Oxford	21
Northern and Yorkshire	26
North Thames	19
South Thames	26
North West	28
South and West	28
West Midlands	12
Trent	11

Figures obtained from Hospice Information Service at St. Christopher's hospice.

Cancer Relief Macmillan Service as at January 1996

Region	*Number of services*
Anglia and Oxford	54
Northern and Yorkshire	88
North Thames	100
South Thames	63
North West	88
South and West	72
West Midlands	57
Trent	58

Figures obtained from Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund (CRMF) and show the number of services employing CRMF staff (this includes those funded as well as those no longer funded by CRMF).

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the health authorities which have no in-patient palliative care hospice within their boundaries. [38845]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Gender Dysphoria

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the population in England and Wales he estimates suffers from gender dysphoria. [40023]

Mr. Malone: I will write to the hon. Member.

Disabled Persons (Carers)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the public expenditure implications of implementing the Disabled Persons and Carers (Short Term Breaks) Bill [*Lords*]. [38846]

Mr. Malone: Any Bill which places a duty on a local authority to assess and provide for services will have significant cost implications.

Operation Waiting Times

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients receiving *(a)* hip replacements, *(b)* cataract extraction, *(c)* kidney transplants and *(d)* hernia operations carried out on the NHS in Great Britain and Northern Ireland had to wait for (i) more than six months, (ii) more than nine months, (iii) more than 12 months, (iv) more than 15 months and (v) more than 18 months in the most recent year for which figures are available. [38849]

Mr. Horam: Information for England is contained in "Hospital Episode Statistics, Volume 2", copies of which are available in the Library. The most recent year for which figures have been published is 1993–94. Questions relating to the rest of the United Kingdom are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Health Service Staff

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by family health services authority or equivalent body the number of *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* midwives, *(d)* health visitors, *(e)* administration and clerical staff and *(f)* managers in (i) 1990, (ii) 1992 and (iii) 1994. [39128]

Mr. Malone: The number of general medical services general practitioners and their staff by family health services authority are published in "General Medical Services Statistics" at October and April for the years requested; copies are available in the Library.

Data for the hospital and community health services non-medical staff cannot be listed by FHSA and could be provided in a different breakdown only at a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the overall number of *(a)* administrative staff, *(b)* managerial staff, *(c)* nurses, *(d)* junior doctors and *(e)* other medical staff employed in each region for each of the last four years. [39129]

Mr. Malone: I will write to the hon. Member.

In-patient Admissions

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of ordinary in-patient admissions by region in each of the last four years. [39130]

Mr. Horam: The latest information is in the publication "ordinary and Day Case Admissions for England: Financial Year 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

MRSA

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals in England and Wales were affected by MRSA—methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus—in each year since 1990. [39021]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on 28 February, *Official Report*, columns *569–70*.

NHS Pension Scheme

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when an actuarial report was carried out on the effect on the NHS pension scheme's overall liabilities of including GP staff in the scheme, and if he will make a statement on the conclusions. [39131]

Mr. Malone: No actuarial report has been carried out. We last consulted the Government Actuary's Department in February this year.

Departmental Vehicles (Traffic Violations)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of traffic violations involving departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39306]

Mr. Horam: This information is not held by the Department. Fines and other penalties are the responsibility of each driver to settle personally, and we would trace the driver only if there was a delay in paying the fine. Our management company, PHH, has records dated from 1994, which state the offence date and the vehicle in question, but does not state the nature of the violation.

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in his name, or that of other Ministers in his Department, for meetings with Conservative. Members immediately preceding questions to his Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39524]

Mr. Horam: None.

Yorkshire RHA

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *528*, how much was spent on the former Yorkshire regional health authority headquarters at Park parade, Harrogate, on *(a)* refurbishment, repairs, maintenance and improvement, and *(b)* on furnishings, fixtures and fittings in each year since 1981. [39281]

Mr. Horam: Total spending on refurbishment, repairs, maintenance, improvement, furnishings, fixtures and fittings of the former Yorkshire regional health authority headquarters at Park parade, Harrogate for the financial years from 1981–82 onwards is shown in the table.

Financial year	*Expenditure £*
1981–82	21,000
1982–83	672,000
1983–84	646,000
1984–85	462,000
1985–86	243,000
1986–87	54,000
1987–88	30,000
1988–89	1,400,000
1989–90	1,400,000
1990–91	46,000
1991–92	371,000
1992–93	88,000
1993–94	56,000

The definitions of fixtures, fittings and building fabric are not distinct and expenditure was not collected separately under these headings at the time the work was carried out.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *334*, regarding employment records for regional health authority staff, if he will provide the information requested on 7 June relating to the former Yorkshire regional health authority from the records held in the regional offices. [39189]

Mr. Malone: This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Care Homes

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if it is his policy that a local authority should not place people in its own directly managed residential care homes at a price, in real terms, higher than that obtainable for comparable quality care in the independent sector; [39879]

(2) what plans he has to ensure that the wish of an individual to be placed in a private residential home of his choice rather than a local authority home so long as the cost is no greater and the service provided is as thorough as the local authority establishment is respected. [39883]

Mr. Dorrell: It is for local authorities to manage their substantial community care resources efficiently and effectively taking full account of their statutory responsibilities. One of these is the responsibility to obtain value for money and we expect them to secure adequate and appropriate care for their clients and the most competitive services regardless of sector. The Government have also issued a statutory direction on choice to make sure that, within certain limits of cost and suitability, people are able to exercise real choice when selecting a care home.

In addition, the Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1996 will enable the Audit Commission and the Department's social services inspectorate to undertake

joint reviews of local authorities' social service departments. The reviews will cover every authority in the country on a cyclical programme with about 20 authorities being reviewed each year. Reviews will focus on the three aspects of performance—cost-effectiveness, quality of service and sensitivity to the wishes and needs of users and carers.

Licences

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the licences currently issued by his Department, indicating their function and the annual administrative costs for each. [37814]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 19 July 1996:]:* The Department is responsible for issuing six types of licence. Their function is to protect public health by setting standards—and controls where appropriate—of safety, quality, efficacy and service. It is not possible to show the administrative costs for each licence.

The types of licence are:

Department of Health:
Approval of private sector places for abortion.

Medicines Control Agency:
Marketing authorisations

Clinical trials certificates

Manufacturers' licences

Wholesale dealers' licences

Homoeopathic registration certificates.

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the proportion of minority ethnic applicants for NHS management training schemes; and what proportion obtained a place in 1995. [37092]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* In 1995, 19 per cent. of applicants to the national health service financial management training scheme and 12 per cent. of those who successfully obtained a place on the scheme were from ethnic minorities. Figures for the NHS management training scheme in the same period were 9 per cent.—of applicants—and 3.3 per cent.—of successful applicants—respectively.

Edgware General Hospital

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further developments have taken place to enable a casualty and emergency unit to replace the existing accident and emergency department at Edgware hospital; when he expects further arrangements to be proposed; and when he will write to the hon. Member for Hendon, North with full details. [38983]

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further developments have taken place to enable a casualty and emergency unit to replace the existing accident and emergency arrangements at Edgware general hospital; when he expects further new arrangements to be proposed; and when he will write to the hon. Member for Harrow, East with full details. [38986]

Sir Rhodes Boyson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further developments have taken place to enable the casualty and emergency unit to replace the existing accident and emergency arrangements at Edgware general hospital; when he expects the new arrangements to be proposed; and when he will write to the hon. Member for Brent, North. [39602]

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the future of Edgware hospital. [39601]

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of Edgware general hospital and its casualty department. [39827]

Mr. Dorrell: Barnet health authority has today sent papers to members in advance of its next meeting on 31 July. The health authority will consider the following recommendations from its officers:

(a) that, in line with the recommendation of the working group which reported to the health authority earlier this month, there should be a medical presence within the casualty service;

(b) that a further working group should be established to explore the development of a GP type admissions unit or the elderly as a demonstration project for which central funding could be sought;

(c) that the opening hours of the casualty service should be considered further in conjunction with the proposal for a demonstration project.

In addition, the health authority will discuss progress on the possible development of a low-risk maternity unit, on which decisions will be made in September.

The health authority will take a decision on these recommendations at its meeting next week. I will write to the local Members immediately after the meeting with further details.

NHS Staff

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the numbers *(a)* employed and *(b)* in training as (i) health visitors, (ii) school nurses, (iii) district nurses and (iv) community psychiatric nurses; [36711]

(2) how many whole-time equivalent *(a)* health visitors, *(b)* school nurses, *(c)* district nurses and *(d)* community psychiatric nurses were in training in each region in September of each year since 1990 broken down by (i) gender and (ii) ethnic origin; [36710]

(3) how many whole-time equivalent *(a)* health visitors, *(b)* school nurses, *(c)* district nurses and *(d)* community psychiatric nurses were employed in each region in September of each year since 1990 broken down by (i) gender and (ii) ethnic origin. [36705]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 11 July 1996]:* Information on numbers of health visitors, school nurses, district nurses, and community psychiatric nurses employed by region and gender will be placed in the Library. Information about their ethnic origin is not available centrally.

Such information as is available on the numbers in training is contained in the English National Board for

Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting's annual report for 1995–96 which was presented to Parliament on 22 July.

TREASURY

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the past 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39150]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Government recognise the crucial role played by small firms in the UK economy and aim to help them by providing sound economic conditions—keeping inflation and interest rates low; reducing legislative administration and taxation burdens; and, where appropriate, provide direct assistance in the form of specialist advice and support and easing access to finance.

Particular Budget measures aimed to boost small businesses include: cutting the small companies rate of corporate tax and the basic rate of income tax; reducing employers' national insurance contributions from April 1997; reducing the qualifying age for capital gains tax retirement relief; improving transitional relief for smaller properties whose rates bill are rising following the 1995 revaluation; reducing class 4 national insurance contributions by the self-employed and withdrawing the 50 per cent. tax relief from these contributions; increasing the VAT threshold; introducing a deregulation package; and introducing a tax code rewritten in simple user-friendly language.

These measures build on last year's package to costs job cuts and ease access to finance.

Transport Workers

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the average working weeks per year for a transport worker in *(a)* the road transport industry, *(b)* the rail industry, *(c)* the aviation industry and *(d)* the maritime industry currently and 10 years ago. [39396]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Available information on average weekly hours worked by industry is given in the new earnings survey, part C, tables 54 and 57, for 1986 and 1995, a copy of which is in the House Library.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many staff were employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96; (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94; [39412]

(2) how many staff are assumed in his Department's budget, employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, *(a)* to work on press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39385]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Economic Performance

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he will take to improve the United Kingdom's economic performance relative to other OECD countries. [37661]

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he will take to improve the United Kingdom's economic performance relative to other OECD countries. [37686]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Government's policies will continue to deliver a stable macro-economic environment and efficient markets. These policies have been very successful. The UK is now performing better against its main competitors. We have enjoyed a stronger recovery since 1992 than any other major European economy, and the OECD expects us to grow significantly faster than Germany, France and Italy in both 1996 and 1997.

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's economic performance in 1995. [37662]

Mrs. Knight: Last year, the UK economy continued its run of healthy growth, low inflation, falling unemployment and declining Government borrowing, and we were able to reduce taxes in the 1995 Budget, thanks to firm control of public spending.

Cattle Slaughter Compensation Scheme

Dr. Strang: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 27 June to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks), *Official Report*, columns *234–35*, if he will list the cost for each financial year from 1996–97 to 1998–99 of *(a)* the compensation arrangements to farmers for cattle over 30 months of age which cannot now enter the food chain, *(b)* the payments to slaughterhouses for handling cattle over 30 months of age which cannot now enter the food chain, *(c)* payments to renderers for handling cattle over 30 months of age which cannot now enter the food chain, *(d)* the cost of storage, prior to incineration, of the rendered remains of cattle over 30 months of age which cannot now enter the food chain, *(e)* the cost of incineration of the remains of cattle over 30 months of age which cannot now enter the food chain, *(f)* the calf slaughter premium, *(g)* the package of aid for the renderers, *(h)* the package of aid for the abattoirs, *(i)* the package of aid to the cutting industries, *(j)* the feed recall scheme and *(k)* the additional running costs for the agriculture departments; and if he will list where applicable the net EU contribution for each measure, taking account of both the UK's contribution to additional EU spending and the effect of additional receipts on the UK abatement. [38803]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The figures are given to the nearest million pounds in the table. Where applicable, the net EU contribution is given between parentheses.

Measure	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
(a) compensation arrangements to farmers for cattle over 30 months of age which cannot now enter the food chain	455 (153)	455 (213)	455 (47)
(b) payments to slaughterhouses for handling cattle over 30 months of age which cannot now enter the food chain, *(c)* payments to renderers for handling cattle over 30 months of age which cannot now enter the food chain, *(d)* the cost of storage, prior to incineration of the remains of cattle over 30 months of age which cannot now enter the food chain, *(e)* cost of incineration of the remains of cattle over 30 months of age which cannot now enter the food chain[1]	120	120	120
(f) calf slaughter premium	50 (36)	50 (18)	50 (14)
(g) package of aid for the renderers	118	59	0
(h) package of aid for the abattoirs, (i) package of aid to the cutting industries[2]	120	0	0
(j) feed recall scheme	6	0	0
(k) additional running costs for the agriculture departments	60	61	60
(l) other miscellaneous BSE expenditure including top up payments on prime beef, beef stocks disposal schemes and compensation and destruction of young bulls in Northern Ireland	108	3	0
Total cost	1,037	748	685

These figures and the figures for the net EU contribution and the net cost to the UK taxpayer are unchanged from those given on 27 June (*Official Report*, columns *234–235*).

[1] A break down of the costs of slaughter, rendering, storage and disposal of animals under the over 30 month scheme could only be carried out at present at disproportionate cost.

[2] A breakdown of the two costs could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Competitiveness

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what role his Department is playing in improving the United Kingdom's competitiveness. [37665]

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the policies of his Department can make on the competitiveness of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [37675]

Mrs. Angela Knight: As the third competitiveness White Paper shows, the Government have created a climate where competitiveness can flourish based on an economy where interest rates are now at historically low levels, inflation has been below 4 per cent. for the longest period for nearly 50 years, corporation tax is among the lowest for major industrialised countries and public finances are under tight control.

Private Finance Initiative

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on progress with the PFI in Yorkshire. [37664]

Mr. Jack: Detailed information on the progress of the PFI by region is not held centrally. However, Yorkshire has a successful track record of agreed PFI deals. The Royal Armouries in Leeds was one of the first PFI projects and makes an important contribution to the success and prosperity of the city. the £50 million project for St. James's hospital in Leeds was announced on 29 January 1996 and is a pioneering project in the health sector. The region will also benefit from deals in the transport sector such as the M1-A1 link road. Other PFI projects for the region, including transport and office accommodation projects, are currently being developed.

EU Contribution

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the aggregate of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the European Union for the past four years; what average annual percentage increase this represents; what is the estimated aggregate net British contribution for the next four years; and what is his estimate of the average annual percentage increase for this period. [37677]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The UK's net contribution over the four years from 1992–93 to 1995–96 amounted to nearly £10 billion, excluding private sector receipts of perhaps £1 billion or more. Estimates covering the whole of the next four-year period are not yet available. Percentage variations fluctuate enormously from year to year depending both on which years are chosen and on the method of calculation.

Graduates

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of people who are economically active and who have a degree, in each ethnic group, are unemployed; [38758]

(2) what percentage that is of the total unemployed; and if he will provide a breakdown by ethnic origin; [38768]

(3) how many people, broken down by ethnic origin, who did not gain a higher education qualification are currently unemployed; and what is that figure as a percentage of the total unemployed; [38760]

(4) what percentage of the total unemployed in each ethnic group *(a)* have a degree and *(b)* do not have a higher education qualification; [38702]

(5) what percentage of people who are economically active and who do not have a higher education qualification, in each ethnic group, are unemployed. [38703]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The available information from the winter 1995–96—December 1995 to February 1996—labour force survey for Great Britain is given in the table.

Economic status of people of working age by highest qualification and ethnic origin winter 1995–96 (not seasonally adjusted)

Great Britain, thousands and per cent.

	All origins	White	Ethnic minority groups	Black	Indian	Pakistani/ Bangladeshi	Mixed/other origins
Percentage of ILO unemployed							
—with degree	7.2	7.1	7.4	'	'	'	'
—with higher education qualification	11.7	11.6	12.6	17.7	'	'	'
—without higher education qualification	88.3	88.4	87.4	82.3	88.8	94.9	85.7
ILO unemployment rate (per cent.)							
—with degree	4.3	4.0	8.0	'	'	'	'
—with higher education qualification	4.2	4.0	8.4	12.9	'	'	'
—without higher education qualification	9.6	9.1	19.8	21.9	14.7	27.9	17.8
ILO unemployed (thousands)							
—with degree	163	146	16	'	'	'	'
—with higher education qualification	265	237	28	14	'	'	'
—without higher education qualification	1,999	1,809	191	63	45	48	34

Note:
' Less than 10,000 in cell: estimate not shown.
Source:
Labour Force Survey.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the total employed under 25-year-olds in each ethnic group are economically active graduates who completed their degree in 1995. [38756]

Mrs. Knight: The labour force survey does not ask people in which year they obtained their qualification.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of the total under 25 years of age population in each ethnic group is unemployed; and what percentage of the total unemployed in each ethnic group is under 25 years of age; [38759]

(2) how many and what percentage of the economically active under 25-year-olds in each ethnic group are unemployed. [38764]

Mrs. Knight: The latest information available from the winter 1995–96—December 1995 to February 1996—labour force survey for Great Britain is given in the table.

ILO unemployed of 16–24 year olds by ethnic origin in winter 1995–96 (not seasonally adjusted)

Great Britain, thousands and per cent.

	All origins	White	Ethnic minority groups	Black	Indian	Pakistani/ Bangladeshi	Mixed/other origins
Numbers of ILO unemployed 16–24 year olds (thousands)	656	596	61	16	14	17	14
As a percentage of all 16–24 year olds	10.4	10.2	12.4	17.2	10.3	12.5	11.0
As a percentage of all ILO unemployed aged 16 and over	28.5	28.7	27.3	20.2	26.3	34.2	33.8
ILO unemployed rates for 16–24 year olds	14.6	14.0	25.1	31.4	18.9	30.1	22.8

Source:
Labour Force Survey.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the current figures for unemployment among the under 25-year-olds in terms of *(a)* actual numbers, *(b)* percentage of total unemployment, *(c)* percentage of the under 25-year-old work force and *(d)* percentage of the under 25-year-old population. [38763]

Mrs. Knight: Latest information available from the labour force survey shows that in Great Britain in spring—March to May—1996, 658,000 people aged 16 to 24 were ILO unemployed. This represents 29.1 per cent. of total ILO unemployment, 14.8 per cent. of those aged 16 to 24 who were economically active—the ILO unemployment rate—and 10.5 per cent. of the 16 to 24-year-old population.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of the total unemployed under 25 years old in each ethnic group are economically active

people who did not have a higher education qualification and who had been a full-time student or pupil the previous year; [38755]

(2) what are the current unemployment figures for economically active people aged under 25 years who did not have a higher education qualification and who had been a full-time student or pupil the previous year in terms of ethnic origin; [38761]

(3) how many economically active people aged under 25 years who did not have a higher education qualification and who had been a full-time student or pupil the previous year are currently unemployed; and what is this figure as a percentage of *(a)* total unemployment, *(b)* total unemployment among under 25-year-olds and *(c)* the total work force of under 25-year-olds who did not have a higher education qualification and who had been a full-time student or pupil the previous year; [38766]

(4) what percentage of the work force in each ethnic group, who are economically active, aged under 25 years without a higher education qualification and had been a full-time student or pupil the previous year, are currently unemployed. [38767]

Mr. Waldegrave: The available information from the labour force survey is given in the table:

ILO unemployed 16–24 year olds without higher education qualifications who were full-time students 1 year previously Spring 1996 (not seasonally adjusted)

Great Britain, thousands and per cent.

	All persons	*White*	*All ethnic minorities*
Numbers (thousands)	160	138	22
(a) as percentage of all ILO unemployed of working age	6.6	6.6	8.8
(b) as percentage of all ILO unemployed 16–24 year olds	23.4	22.7	28.6
(c) as percentage of all economically active 16–24 year olds without higher qualifications who were FT students 1 year previously full time	21.2	19.6	43.6

Source:
Labour Force Survey.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of the work force in each ethnic group, who are economically active people aged under 25 years whose highest qualification was a degree and who had been a full-time student the previous year, are currently unemployed; [38757]

(2) what are the current unemployment figures for economically active people aged under 25 years whose highest qualification was a degree and who had been a full-time student the previous year, in terms of ethnic origin; [38762]

(3) what are the current unemployment figures for economically active people aged under 25 years whose highest qualification was a degree and who had been a full-time student the previous year in tems of *(a)* actual numbers, *(b)* percentage of total unemployment, *(c)* percentage of total unemployment among the under 25-year-olds and *(d)* percentage of the total work force of under 25-year-olds whose highest qualification was a degree and who had been in full-time education in the previous year. [38765]

Mrs. Knight: This information is not available.

Public Sector Debt

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received regarding public sector debt. [37659]

Mr. Waldegrave: The UK has the third lowest debt to GDP ratio in the European Union, and unlike every other G7 economy our debt to GDP ratio is lower now than in 1979.

Privatisation

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current estimate of receipts to the Treasury from privatisation sales in 1996–97. [37660]

Mr. Jack: The current estimate, as published in the summer economic forecast, is £4½ billion.

Company Taxation

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the tax burden on companies in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other major European countries. [37663]

Mr. Jack: Britain's tax burden compares very favourably with other major European countries, as the most recent OECD survey confirms.

Direct Taxation

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the level of direct taxation. [37666]

Mr. Jack: We have received a number of representations from the public on the level of direct taxation, many of which welcomed the steps towards a 20p basic rate taken in the last Budget.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors underlay the lower than projected yield of value added tax in 1995–96. [37667]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The matter is currently being looked at by a working group comprised of officials from HM Treasury and HM Customs and Excise. The probability is that there is no single explanation, but a range of contributory factors. Receipts for the first quarter of 1996–97 are showing healthy growth.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to ensure the consistency of his proposals with EU law for a retrospective limitation on claims for recovery of value added tax as a result of a customs mistake; [39604]

(2) what plans he has to ensure the legitimate expectations of taxpayers in respect of repayment of VAT are met; and if he will make a statement; [39605]

(3) what considerations led to the setting of *(a)* the statutory limitation period for customs recovery of value added tax and *(b)* the proposal for the period regarding taxpayers recovery; and if he will make a statement. [39603]

Mr. Waldegrave: There are no harmonised European Community rules applying to recovery of overpaid VAT. Member states are free to determine their own procedures for claims provided that they respect Community law principles. National time limits for VAT—which operate within an EC framework—cannot be less favourable than those applying for similar domestic taxes, and procedures must not make it excessively difficult for a taxpayer to exercise his Community rights.

The new three-year cap on retrospective refunds of VAT will apply to all the indirect taxes and duties administered by customs. EC law already imposes a three-year limit in respect of repayment of customs duty.

A three-year time limit on refunds achieves a proper balance between the rights of individual taxpayers and the public interest. The Government have become concerned at the increasing amounts of revenue at risk in taxation boundary disputes, in some cases back to the introduction of VAT in 1973. A three-year limit will introduce certainty both for taxpayers and the Exchequer, and is proportionate in effect because, at the time of the relevant transactions, both taxpayers and their customers will normally have worked on the assumption that the tax was due.

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new registrations for VAT there were in South Derbyshire in each of the last five years. [39758]

Mr. Waldegrave: Customs does not have information concerning the number of new registrations in South Derbyshire alone. The local VAT office at Derby covers, in addition to South Derbyshire, parts of Leicestershire and Staffordshire. The number of VAT registrations for that area in the last five calendar years is as follows:

Year	*New registrations*
1991	1,869
1992	1,805
1993	1,900
1994	1,670
1995	1,766
1996 (to 30 June 1996)	1,000

Taxation

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations have been made to him regarding the economic impact of current levels of taxation. [37669]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received regarding the economic impact of current levels of taxation. [37679]

Mr. Jack: We have received a number of representations from the public on current levels of taxation, many of which have welcomed the tax cuts made in my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's November budget.

Capital Taxation

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the reform of the taxation of capital. [37671]

Mr. Jack: The Government have received a number of different representations, which will be carefully considered. The abolishing of capital taxes and inheritance tax remain stated objectives of the Government.

House Prices

Mr. Spring: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the pattern of house price movements in the past 12 months. [37672]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Over the 12 months to June, national average house prices—as measured by the Halifax index—rose by 4 per cent. The disaggregated figures show that house prices have risen in all regions of the UK over this period. Rising living standards, low inflation and the lowest mortgage rates for nearly 30 years mean that the conditions are right for the recovery in the housing market to be sustained.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on present levels of public expenditure. [37674]

Mr. Waldegrave: The current level of general government expenditure is £308 billion. The Cabinet discussed the forthcoming public expenditure survey last week. We reaffirmed our commitment to reduce the share of national income taken by the state. We agreed that spending should be kept within the tightest possible limits, and certainly within the cash plans my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor announced in the Budget last year.

Living Standards

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the growth in living standards in the next year. [37680]

Mr. Jack: Real personal disposable income is expected to increase by 2½ per cent. this year and by a further 3 per cent. in 1997.

Industrial and Provident Societies

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last me the Registrar of Friendly Societies to discuss the registration of industrial and provident societies. [37681]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have not met the Registrar of Friendly Societies to discuss registration of industrial and provident societies and have no plans to do so.

Electricity Bills

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in the average

domestic electricity bill since the industry was privatised; and how the privatisation has affected Government revenues. [37682]

Mr. Jack: The typical UK household electricity bill has fallen by £18 between 1990 and 1995, in real terms excluding VAT. On top of this, bills will fall by about a fifth this year. Privatising the electricity industry has contributed over £20 billion to Government revenues, and the privatised companies now contribute about £1 billion in corporation tax each year.

Inward Investment

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effect of his policies for the economy on levels of inward investment. [37684]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Government's economic policies have helped the UK to attract more inward direct investment, in relation to GDP, than any other major economy, with over £20 billion in 1995 alone. In 1995–96, the Invest in Britain bureau was notified of 477 inward investment projects, creating almost 50,000 new jobs and safeguarding as many again. This strong performance is being maintained this year, with LG of Korea announcing £1.7 billion investment in south Wales, creating 6,100 new jobs—the largest inward investment ever made in Europe.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the PSBR. [37673]

Mr. Waldegrave: Borrowing is continuing to fall and is on a clear downward trend. As a share of GDP the PSBR for 1996–97 will be half its 1993–94 level.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will commission a study into the accuracy of his Department's original forecast of the current year's PSBR. [37687]

Mr. Waldegrave: No. The PSBR is the difference between two large numbers and forecasts are subject to large margins of error. The average error on forecasts made in November for the year ahead is 1½ per cent. of GDP, or £11 billion at current day prices. The error on the 1994 Budget forecast of the 1995–96 PSBR was just under £11 billion, an average-sized forecast error.

Departmental Vehicles (Traffic Violations)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the number of traffic violations involving departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39299]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury does not own any vehicles.

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in his name, or that of other Ministers in his Department, for meetings with Conservative Members immediately preceding questions to his Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39529]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: None.

Air Passenger Duty

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue has been raised from air passenger duty since its introduction. [39286]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Air passenger duty receipts, together with those for all other Customs and Excise taxes, are published every month by the Office for National Statistics in table 2.1D of the publication "Financial Statistics", which is held in the House of Commons Library.

Diesel Vehicles

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what *(a)* fiscal and *(b)* other measures he has evaluated to encourage research into particulate traps for diesel vehicles; [39757]

(2) what *(a)* fiscal and *(b)* other measures he has evaluated to encourage the use of low-sulphur diesel fuel. [39756]

Mr. Jack: I have continued to look at a wide range of measures to promote the use of cleaner vehicles, technologies and fuels. I will carefully consider all these measures before reaching a judgment for the forthcoming Budget.

Publications

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average price of *(a)* "Social Trends" publications and *(b)* Economic Trends publications in each year since 1993. [39753]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The prices for the "Social Trends" and "Economic Trends" group of publications in each year since 1993 have been:

£ pounds

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Social Trends (Annual)	26.00	27.00	34.95	35.95
Economic Trends (Monthly)	12.75	13.25	19.95	21.00
ET Quarterly Supplement	9.00	18.00	18.00	21.00
ET Annual Supplement	16.50	17.00	24.95	26.95
Economic Trends annual subscription (all three titles including postage)	155.00	196.00	320.00	335.00

Prices and subscriptions are fixed for the calendar year.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many visits (i) he and (ii) his Ministers made to *(a)* the Newbury constituency and *(b)* other constituencies in the last 12 months. [39867]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In the past 12 months my ministerial colleagues and I have made a number of visits to constituencies but have made no visits to the Newbury constituency.

Redundancies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many redundancies have been notified to his Department by employers in *(a)* the York parliamentary constituency, *(b)* the York travel-to-work area and *(c)* North Yorkshire in each of the last five years. [39569]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Information is not available for York parliamentary constituency, the travel-to-work area, or for North Yorkshire. In the Yorkshire, Humberside region the 1995 winter labour force survey estimates 19,000 people had been made redundant in the three months prior to interview.

Abortions

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will give a breakdown by gestation of pregnancy of the number of abortions performed in the north-west region in the latest year for which figures are available; [39865]

(2) how many abortions have now been performed in total within the north-west region under the provisions of the Abortion Act 1967; and how many and what percentage of those abortions were performed in emergency to save the life of the woman; [39863]

(3) if he will make a statement on the statistically most likely candidate for an abortion within the north-west region after the 24th week of pregnancy in the latest year for which figures are available in terms of *(a)* the age of the woman, *(b)* the marital status of the woman, *(c)* the number of previous children of the woman and *(d)* the grounds under which the abortion is performed; [39862]

(4) if he will give a breakdown by the procedure adopted of the number of abortions performed in the north-west region in the latest year for which figures are available. [39864]

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will indicate the statistically most likely candidate for an abortion within the NHS South Thames region after the 24th week of pregnancy, in the latest year for which figures are available, in terms of *(a)* the age of the woman, *(b)* the marital status of the woman, *(c)* the number of previous children of the woman and *(d)* the grounds under which the abortion is performed. [39781]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Members shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the statistically most likely candidate for an abortion within the north-west region in the latest year for which figures are available in terms of *(a)* the age of the woman, *(b)* the marital status of the woman, *(c)* the number of previous children of the woman and *(d)* the grounds under which the abortion is performed. [39861]

Mr. Waldegrave: The statistically most likely candidate for an abortion for each of the variables listed is defined as the category with the highest recorded frequency of legal terminations. The percentages are based on all legal terminations performed in 1993, to women usually resident in the north-west health region.

The categories with the highest frequencies found in each of the variables are as follows:

age of the woman: 20–24 age group comprised 32 per cent. (3,742) of all terminations.

Marital status: single women comprised 29 per cent. (3,232) of all terminations.

Number of previous children born by the woman: women with no previous (live and still born) children born to them, comprised 49 per cent. (5,669) of all terminations.

Legal ground under which abortion was performed: statutory ground C alone comprised 84 per cent. (9,689) of all terminations. The definition of ground C is "that the pregnancy has not exceeded its 24th week and that the continuance of pregnancy would involve risk, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated, or injury to the physical or mental health of the woman".

Reference: 1993 Abortion Statistics, England and Wales, Series AB no. 20.

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown by gestation of pregnancy of the number of abortions performed in the NHS South Thames region in the latest year for which figures are available. [39775]

Mr. Waldegrave: Figures for 1994 which give a breakdown of the number of abortions performed to usually resident women in the South Thames health region by gestation of pregnancy can be found in the OPCS monitor series AB95/9, "Legal abortions in England and Wales 1994: residents of regional and district health areas".

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will indicate the statistically most likely candidate for an abortion within the South Thames region in the latest year for which figures are available in terms of *(a)* the age of the woman, *(b)* the marital status of the woman, *(c)* the number of previous children of the woman and *(d)* the grounds under which the abortion is performed. [39772]

Mr. Waldegrave: The statistically most likely candidate for an abortion for each of the variables listed is defined as the category with the highest recorded frequency of legal terminations. The percentages are based on all legal terminations performed in 1993, to women usually resident in the South East and South West Thames health regions.

The categories with the highest frequencies found in each of the variables are as follows:

Age of the woman: 20–24 age group comprised 29 per cent. (7,113) of all terminations.

Marital status: single woman comprised 25 per cent. (6,140) of all terminations.

Number of previous children born by the woman: women with no previous (live and still born) children born to them, comprised 37 per cent. (9,245) of all terminations.

Legal ground under which the abortion was performed: statutory ground C alone comprised 85 per cent. (21,328) of all terminations. The definition of ground C is "that the pregnancy has not exceeded its 24th week and that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated, or injury to the physical or mental health of the women".

Reference: 1993 Abortions Statistics, England and Wales, Series AB no. 20.

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many abortions have been performed in total within the NHS South Thames region under the provisions of the Abortions Act 1967; and how many and what percentage of those abortions were performed in emergency to save the life of the mother. [39776]

Mr. Waldegrave: The total number of abortions carried out under the Abortion Act, to women usually resident in the South Thames health region[1] from 1970 to 1994[2] was 529,032. During this period 10 abortions, 0 per cent. of the total number of abortions performed were carried out in an emergency, certified by the operating practitioner as immediately necessary, to save the life of the woman[3].

[1] Figures are based, where possible, on 1994 health authority boundaries. Other boundary changes have not been reflected in the figures.

[2] Figures for 1968–69 are not held on a comparable basis.

[3] Abortions performed under statutory grounds 5 (1970—31st March 1991) and F (1st April 1991—present) i.e. where in the case of emergency it was necessary to save the life of the woman.

Capital Gains

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total amount of capital gains outstanding for each of the last 10 years; and if he will list the longest period for which capital gains has been unpaid while negotiations with the Inland Revenue continue for *(a)* individuals, *(b)* companies and *(c)* trusts. [39685]

Mr. Jack: The amount of capital gains tax outstanding as at 31 October in each of the last 10 years is as follows:

Year	Amount (£ million)	Year	Amount (£ million)
1985	128.1	1990	206.4
1986	132.1	1991	224.4
1987	139.5	1992	196.9
1988	145.6	1993	177.1
1989	165.5	1994	150.7

The information requested in the second part of the question is not available.

Departmental Forms

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many forms his Department issues annually; and in how many categories. [37688]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* The information on statistical inquiries to businesses by the Office for National Statistics is in its compliance plan for 1996 to 1998, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Employment Statistics

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many men between the ages of 16 and 60 years were in *(a)* full-time employment and *(b)* part-time employment in each year between 1992 and 1996. [38954]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* The available information from the labour force survey for Great Britain is given in the table:

Men aged 16–59 working full-time and part-time Spring 1992 to Winter 1995–96 (not seasonally adjusted)

	Great Britain, thousands	
	Full-time	Part-time
Spring 1992	12,337	713
Spring 1993	12,089	758
Spring 1994	12,127	849
Spring 1995	12,297	858
Winter 1995–96	12,308	894

Source:
Labour Force Survey.

Ms Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the numbers of women between the ages of 16 and 60 years in *(a)* full-time employment and *(b)* part-time employment below 16 hours in each of the years 1992 to 1996. [38899]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* The available information from the labour force survey for Great Britain is given in the following table:

Women aged 16–59 working full-time and part-time Spring 1992 to Winter 1995–96 (not seasonally adjusted)

	Great Britain		Thousands
	Full time	Part time 16 hours and over	Part time under 16 hours
Spring 1992	6,140	2,690	1,888
Spring 1993	6,087	2,749	1,868
Spring 1994	6,073	2,813	1,860
Spring 1995	6,160	2,822	1,842
Winter 1995	6,169	2,922	1,897

Source:
Labour Force Survey.

Statistical Forms

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the statistical forms issued to businesses by his Department, indicating the number of each sent out. [38678]

Mr. Jack: Treasury Departments require information about economic activity and the collection of taxes. Forms are a very necessary part of these processes. There are several hundreds of different types of forms, many of which are variations—for example, Welsh language versions—resulting in several millions of forms issued every year, to two categories; individuals and businesses. To give precise figures would involve disproportionate cost, but the main examples are: for the Inland Revenue, 7 million individual tax returns; for HM Customs and Excise, 6.8 million VAT returns; around ½ million VAT registration forms, although only 180,000 are returned by businesses; 1.5 million Intrastat survey forms; and 175,000 betting and gaming duty forms, all issued to business; for the Office for National Statistics, 1.5 million forms in 101 separate statistical inquiries of business. The information on statistical inquiries to businesses by the Office for National Statistics is in the compliance plan for 1996 to 1998, a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

The Treasury's Departments recognise the need to keep the number of forms they require to be completed to a minimum and that those which are necessary should be well designed. They have set targets for reducing the burden they impose on businesses.

Employment (Yorkshire and Humberside)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females in (i) full-time and (ii) part-time employment in (1) North Yorkshire and (2) Yorkshire and Humberside earn less than £3.40 an hour. [38938]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* Information available from the new earnings survey is provided in the table.

Employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey pay-period was unaffected by absence
Average gross hourly pay (excluding overtime)

Percentage of employees earning less than £3.40 per hour

	North Yorkshire	*Yorkshire and Humberside*
Males		
Full-time	4.4	3.7
Part-time	27.9	27.1
Females		
Full-time	12.6	9.4
Part-time	25.4	22.4

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what proportion of people aged under 25 years are *(a)* in full-time employment, *(b)* in part-time employment, *(c)* in full-time education and *(d)* on Government-supported training schemes in (i) York, (ii) North Yorkshire, (iii) Yorkshire and Humberside and (iv) England in each year since 1991. [38937]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* Available information is for England and Yorkshire and Humberside. This is provided in the table.

Persons aged under 25: at spring

(Thousand)

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Full-time employment[1]					
England	3,170	2,738	2,471	2,319	2,257
Yorkshire and Humberside	346	283	269	235	233
Part-time employment[1]					
England	732	769	778	842	853
Yorkshire and Humberside	69	86	81	89	87
Full-time education					
England	1,427	1,635	1,617	1,779	1,843
Yorkshire and Humberside	145	167	162	184	194
Government-supported training and employment programmes					
England	231	196	188	174	144
Yorkshire and Humberside	28	27	27	23	21

Source:
Labour Force Survey.
Note:
[1] Excludes government-supported training and employment programmes.

Persons aged under 25: at spring

(Per cent.)

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Full-time employment[1]					
England	20	17	16	15	15
Yorkshire and Humberside	21	17	16	14	14
Part-time employment[1]					
England	5	5	5	5	5
Yorkshire and Humberside	4	5	5	5	5
Full-time education					
England	9	10	10	11	12
Yorkshire and Humberside	9	10	10	11	12
Government-supported training and employment programmes					
England	1	1	1	1	1
Yorkshire and Humberside	2	2	2	1	1

Source:
Labour Force Survey.
Note:
[1] Excludes government-supported training and employment programmes.

Community Budget

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will be publishing the statement on the 1996 Community budget. [39943]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have today laid before Parliament the statement on the 1996 Community budget, entitled "European Community Finances". This White Paper is the 16th in the series. As in the past it covers annual budgetary matters. It also describes the budget for 1996 as adopted by the European Parliament and the United Kingdom's gross and net contributions to the Community budget over the years 1993 to 1996.

As last year, the annual statement also includes details of recent developments in European Community financial management and in countering fraud against the Community budget.

I have placed copies of the White Paper in the Library of the House.

Child Benefit

Ms Lynne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what savings he estimates would be made annually if child benefit were taxed at *(a)* 40 per cent. *(b)* 24 per cent. and *(c)* 20 per cent. rates on (i) mothers' and (ii) fathers' earnings. [3949]

Mr. Jack: The yield from taxing it at specified rates would depend on whether all taxpayers were to face the same tax rate on child benefit or whether taxpayers with a lower marginal rate would pay tax at their own marginal rate.

Long-term Care Insurance

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the regulation of selling and marketing of long-term care insurance. [39944]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Government's consultation document, "A new partnership for care in old age", published on 7 May, invited comments on a proposed partnership scheme to provide extra protection from the

means test for residential care to people who took out a "partnership product" to meet some of the costs of their long-term care. Two kinds of partnership product for inclusion in the partnership scheme were mentioned-indemnity insurance and immediate needs annuities. Views were also invited on whether the selling and marketing of long-term care insurance should be regulated under the Financial Services Act 1986, as annuities are already.

It is important, especially as these products will be sold primarily to the elderly, to ensure that arrangements for regulating the products are properly considered. Equally, it is important for any regulation to be cost-effective, and widely accepted as effective for the development of the market in long-term care insurance.

The Treasury is examining the issues raised by responses to the consultation document concerned with regulation. These suggest there is a consensus in favour of regulation under the Financial Services Act 1986, covering the marketing and selling of all long-term care insurance products. Before a decision is taken to extend the scope of the Financial Services Act in this way, the Treasury will explore further the detailed question of how it should be achieved, and will issue a consultation document in the autumn seeking views of interested groups, including financial services participants and consumer interest groups.

Tax Booklet

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update the information given in the July 1995 "Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs" booklet. [40017]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Treasury is today publishing a booklet containing estimates of the effects of various illustrative tax changes on tax receipts in 1997–98 and 1998–99 and preliminary estimates of the costs of the main tax reliefs in 1995–96 and 1996–97. Copies are being placed in the Library of the House.

Life Assurance

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the reform of the tax rules for life assurance policy holders and the proposal to publish draft legislation. [39942]

Mr. Jack: The Government intend later this year to publish draft clauses and secondary legislation on the taxation of life assurance and similar policyholders. The draft legislation would form the basis of a comprehensive code for taxing profits from life assurance policies and other types of insurance which are used for investment. The aim of the new rules is to conserve what is good in the existing regime, which dates from 1968, but to modernise it to take account of nearly 30 years of developments in the insurance industry. If enacted, the legislation would give effect to the proposed reform of policyholder taxation I announced on 8 November last year, *Official Report*, column 912.

At the time of that announcement it was hoped that the draft legislation would be available in the spring, but we have found that more time is needed for the preparation of the new rules. In order to allow time for full consultation with all interested parties, the Government have decided that they will not, in any event, introduce legislation based on the draft clauses in the next Finance Bill.

Earlier this year there was speculation that the Inland Revenue was intending to change the tax treatment of guaranteed income bonds, which are a life assurance-based product. An Inland Revenue press release of 15 March made it clear that it was Ministers' intention to ensure that the tax treatment of holders of existing bonds was consistent with the insurance industry's understanding of the position at that time. That remains true, and discussions with the insurance industry's representatives, including the Association of British Insurers, are continuing to determine how this might be achieved.

Capital Allowances

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he proposes to make to the rules on capital allowances for fixtures following the House of Lords case last year of Melluish *v.* BMI (No. 3) Ltd. and others. [39945]

Mr. Jack: The Government intend to introduce legislation in the next Finance Bill to correct defects in the rules for giving capital allowances on fixtures in buildings. These defects allow tax to be avoided by obtaining allowances on more than the cost of the fixture and through the acceleration of allowances. The legislation will also reverse that part of the decision of the House of Lords in Melluish *v.* BMI (No. 3) Ltd. which gave allowances to equipment lessors on fixtures leased to persons not liable to tax. The new rules will apply to expenditure incurred on or after today.

These changes open the way to simplify and deregulate these rules. At present, valuations have to be made whenever allowances are claimed on fixtures included in a property sale. This has been criticised as complex, costly and incorrect. The Inland Revenue will publish proposals today for consultation. The proposals would, in many cases, allow figures agreed between the purchaser and the vendor to be accepted for tax purposes. The Inland Revenue will also consult with representatives of the property industry and their professional advisers on ways in which the rules could be improved further. Subject to the outcome of the consultation, we intend to introduce these measures in the next Finance Bill.

Building Societies Bill

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the responses to the consultation of the draft Building Societies Bill. [39947]

Mrs. Angela Knight: We published the draft Building Societies Bill on 18 March allowing three months' public consultation. We received responses from the following:

Abbey National
Age Concern
Allen and Overy
Association of Unit Trust and Investment Funds
Banking Insurance and Finance Union
Banking Ombudsman

Beverley Building Society
Birmingham Midshires Building Society
Bishop and Robertson Chalmers Solicitors
Bradford and Bingley Building Society
Britannia Building Society
British Bankers' Association
Building Societies Association
Building Societies Ombudsman
Cameron Markby Hewitt
F. F. H. Charlton Esq
Chartered Association of Certified Accountants
Chelsea Building Society
Cheshire Building Society
Clay Cross Building Society
Consumers Association
Coopers and Lybrand
Coventry Building Society
A. B. Craven Esq
Cumberland Building Society
Darlington Building Society
Derbyshire Building Society
Dudley Building Society
Dunfermline Building Society
Earl Shilton Building Society
V. Edmonds Esq
Financial Law Panel
F. J. Griffiths
Halifax Building Society
Hanley Economic Building Society
J. Hanlon Esq
M. Hardern Esq
Hinckley and Rugby Building Society
IBCA Ltd.
Imperial Building Society
Institute of Chartered Accountants
Institute of Credit Management—Technical Advisory Committee
Institute of Directors
Kent Reliance Building Society
Lambeth Building Society
M. L. Lampitt Esq
Law Society
Leeds and Holbeck Building Society
Professor D. T. Llewellyn
Timothy Lloyd QC
Manchester Building Society
Mansfield Building Society
Market Harborough Building Society
Nationwide Building Society
National Association of Estate Agents
National Consumer Council
National Consumer Credit Federation
National Federation of Consumer Groups
Natwest Capital Markets Ltd.
Network Industrial Relations Services
Newbury Building Society
Newcastle Building Society
Norwich and Peterborough Building Society
Nottingham Building Society
Penrith Building Society
Portman Building Society
E. Rodd Esq
Scarborough Building Society
D. T. Shutt Esq
W. Simpson Esq
Skipton Building Society
Small Business Bureau
Staffordshire Building Society
Stroud and Swindon Building Society
Teachers Building Society
Tipton and Coseley Building Society
Universal Building Society
C. D. Watson Esq
Yorkshire Building Society

Copies of responses from respondents, who have no objection to them being made public, are available from Miss Leigh Kalcher, HM Treasury, room 36a/ground, Parliament street, London SW1P 3AG (Tel 0171 270 4487).

Private Estates (Public Funding)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what considerations he takes into account when authorising the payment of grants of public money to owners of landed estates of more than 500 acres to improve private buildings on those estates; and if he will make a statement. [39170]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* I have been asked to reply.

In England, Government funding channelled through English Heritage is available for structural repairs to those buildings that English Heritage consider to be of outstanding historic or architectural interest. In deciding whether a grant should be made English Heritage takes account of factors such as the nature, cost and urgency of the proposed works, and also other resources available to the property owner. The general principle behind Government policy is that owners should be responsible for the repair of their own properties, and public funding should be provided only where it is clearly needed to preserve the fabric of our heritage. In accordance with this principle, procedures have been drawn up to assess the resources available to historic estates.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female claimants of (i) severe disablement allowance, (ii) incapacity benefit, (iii) unemployment benefit claimed for an adult dependant but were disqualified; and if he will break the figures down by category of disqualification. [34218]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the *(a)* numbers of claimants gaining or losing and *(b)* amounts of costs and savings arising from the option of voluntary reporting of changes of circumstances between fixed-term reviews as detailed in his departmental research report No. 45. [37422]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not centrally available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those benefits where payments currently are lower in real terms than in 1979; and how many people *(a)* are now and *(b)* were in 1979 drawing each of those benefits. [35579]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on Monday 22 July, *Official Report*, column *65*.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was paid out in benefits *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in the north-west and *(c)* in Warrington in 1995–96. [37557]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Expenditure on social security benefits in Great Britain in 1995–96 is estimated to have been £88.8 billion.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate listed by benefit of *(a)* the numbers gaining from and *(b)* the costs of amending the Social Security Benefit (Computation of Earnings) Regulations 1978 to calculate earnings (i) net of income tax and (ii) to disregard half of any contribution made towards an occupational or private pension scheme. [39186]

Mr. Heald: Based on the data contained in the family resources survey, it is estimated that the number gaining, and the costs of amending, the Social Security (Computation of Earnings) Regulations to calculate earnings net of income tax and to disregard half of any contribution made towards an occupational or personal pension would be negligible.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what proportion of claimants of *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* incapacity benefit and *(c)* severe disablement allowance received payments from earnings during 1995–96. [39005]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available relates to unemployment benefit and is set out in the table:

Number and percentage of unemployment benefit recipients receiving payments from earnings—Great Britain

	November 1995	*February 1996*
Total number of unemployment benefit recipients receiving earnings (thousands)	16	16
Percentage of all unemployment benefit recipients receiving earnings	4	4

Notes:
1. A number of recipients who receive earnings do not have the information recorded on the computer system. These figures relate to computerised claims only and should therefore be taken as a broad indication only.
2. Figures apply to claimants who were receiving unemployment benefit on the second Thursday of the months shown and who have earnings in the benefit week in which that date fell.

Source:
Five per cent. sample of unemployed claimants in Great Britain on the second Thursday of the months shown.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon will receive answers to his questions about the child care disregard, adult dependency increases and benefits uprating tabled on 21 June. [39187]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave him on Wednesday 3 July, *Official Report*, column *469*, and today and to the reply given to him by the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans), on Tuesday 23 July.

Disability

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what considerations led him to exclude from the definition of disability the personality disorders set out in section 4(1) of the Disability Discrimination (Meaning of Disability) Regulations 1996. [34861]

Mr. Burt: A consultation document, published in December 1995, stated that the Government intended to exclude from the definition of disability kleptomania, paedophilia and personality disorders including psychopathic disorders. The document went on to say that this was because, while such disorders might meet the definition of disability in the Act, the Government believe that it would be wrong to require employers and service providers to consider adjustments to cater for these conditions. Over 75 per cent. of those who expressed a view agreed with the proposal.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans there are to seek tenders for a replacement for the Child Support Agency computer. [36175]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: If it is decided to replace or upgrade the Child Support Agency computer system, a procurement exercise will be conducted in accordance with the EC directives which govern public sector procurement. This legislation ensures fair and open competition and results in the selection of the supplier whose bid offers best value for money. The Department cannot speculate as to the outcome of any procurement exercise.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average length of time taken by his Department to reply to letters from hon. Members on

matters relating to the Child Support Agency; and how many complaints from hon. Members his Department has received in each of the months since the Child Support Agency started its operations in April 1993. [39740]

Mr. Mitchell: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individual personal records the Child Support Agency computer system was designed to accommodate. [39689]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 24 July 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency Computer System.

The database structure of the main Child Support Computer System would enable it to hold just over 11.5 million records of individual people

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what data are required for the purposes of monitoring his targets for the Child Support Agency; and for how long it is required to be held. [39690]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 24 July 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency data held for monitoring the targets he sets the Agency.

The Child Support Agency's targets for 1996/97 are as follows:

(1) Collection—A band of £380 million to £400 million of maintenance to be collected or arranged for direct payment from the absent parent to the parent with care in 1996/97.

(2) Payments—95% of payments to the parent with care to be made within 10 working days of receipt from an absent parent.

(3) Accuracy—To achieve a continuing improvement in accuracy so that in at least 85% of cases checked during March 1997 the cash value of the assessment will be correct.

(4) Second Tier Reviews—Where a client is dissatisfied with a Child Support Officer's decision and requests a review, 55% to be cleared within 13 weeks; 80% to be cleared within 26 weeks; and no more than 15% to be older than 26 weeks as at 31 March 1997.

(5) Maintenance Assessments—60% of new maintenance applications to be cleared within 26 weeks and as at 31 March 1997, no more than 10% of all maintenance applications received by the Agency to be over 52 weeks old.

In order to measure Agency performance and effectiveness, statistical and financial data is obtained from a wide range of sources. Collection of this information can be both clerical and from scans of the Child Support Computer System. The information is used not only to measure performance against the targets but also to manage the business effectively. Statistical and financial data is retained as long as there is a business need to do so and the periods involved vary considerably from say 18 months to many years.

I am sorry I cannot be more precise but this is a very wide ranging question; nevertheless I hope this information is helpful to you.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidelines are issued to staff in Benefits Agency offices regarding the structure of interviews and range of questions asked of unemployed people. [36168]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what guidelines are issued to staff in Benefits Agency (BA) offices regarding the structure of interviews and range of questions asked of unemployed people.

The Code of Office Practice (COP) provides general advice on interviewing for BA staff. I have enclosed a copy of the relevant extracts for your information.

There is no specific guidance on the structure of interviews or the range of questions to ask unemployed people. BA staff interview a wide range of customers including the unemployed. The nature of each interview depends on the customers individual circumstances.

I hope this reply has been helpful.

INTERVIEWING ADVICE

Introduction

The following paragraphs contain advice on interviewing callers at the LO, employers and people in their own homes. Not all paragraphs are relevant in all situations. Try to adopt the following suggestions whenever you interview someone. A good interview is not simply a matter of being nice to the public.

Your manner

Being courteous

Show that you value every person as a person. Call someone by their name if you know it. Never address someone by their surname only. In some localities it is customary to use a first name only. Judge whether this will be acceptable to the interviewee. Stand up when introduced. Shake hands, if it is expected. You may be visiting an employer, or meeting an old person who is accustomed to shaking hands at an introduction.

Being sensitive

For most people, coming to the LO or receiving a home visit is an important event. They may be nervous, or noisy and talkative. Old people for instance are often flustered. Put them at ease. Be friendly but professional. Recognise that giving information about personal affairs can be an ordeal. Reassure them that information supplied to the Department is given in confidence and will be respected. Don't forget how uncertain you felt on your first day.

Listening hard

It is not enough just to seem attentive. Listening requires constant mental effort.

Checking personal prejudices

Do not let personal views colour your judgement and behaviour. In the course of your work you may find that you have been lied to or misled. This is a hazard you must learn to live with.

Explaining and informing

Give accurate information. If you sense the interviewee might not fully understand the issues, give explanations without waiting to

be asked. Be objective. See all sides of an issue. Explain the issue leaflets. You may be asked for advice on matters outside the Department's work. Be as helpful as possible but do not give advice on legal and technical matters outside the Department's scope. Keep a list of useful organisations in the area. If you can't answer the query, suggest someone who might be able to, for example the CAB.

For all other social security benefits except SB/IVB and UB encourage enquirers to claim benefit immediately if it seems possible that they may be entitled. They would not be adversely affected if they claimed benefit and this was disallowed but they may lose benefit if they delay claiming.

Take care when advising about SB/IVB and UB. An unsuccessful claim establishes a period of interruption of employment (PIE) and can affect entitlement adversely for subsequent linked claims if the claimant has a deficient contribution record in the original relevant income tax year (RITY). Explain to an enquirer the relationship between tax and benefit years, and the linking rules. Give them the relevant leaflet and encourage them to decide when to make a claim. Point out that a claim cannot be withdrawn after the adjudication officer has given their decision. If a claimant decides to defer their claim to gain the advantage of a later RITY for which they have a better contribution record, tell them how they can submit 'credits only' claims in the meantime.

Never tell people that they will be better off claiming benefits paid by other departments or organisations. If you think this may be the case, give the person all the relevant facts at your disposal. Suggest that they consult the other organisation before making up his mind.

Forecasting

Most people try to provide for their retirement. You may be asked about the pension a person can expect when they retire. Perhaps the question may be linked to a contributions enquiry. This type of question is often difficult to answer precisely, yet the person needs the best information you can give. Always send a written reply. Use one of the DN/NP 322 letters whenever possible. Make it clear at the beginning of the letter that:

(1) the information you have given is based on:

(a) what you have been told about the person's circumstances; and

(b) the law as it is at present; and

(2) as both of these may change, the advice or information you have given may be outdated.

Apply these principles to all enquiries which involve forecasting.

Interviewing points to remember

When conducting an interview, remember the following "good practices":

(1) Identify yourself, preferably by name. This will be especially reassuring to a blind person. Alternatively wear a lapel badge bearing your name or obtain a personal name plate.

(2) Do not smoke in front of the person being interviewed.

(3) Make certain that the interviewees cannot read anything about themselves from the official documents that are necessary for the interview. Do not leave CPs, GBUs or files with interviewees.

(4) If you are asked to countersign a document certifying the identify of the person named on the form, sign only if you have sufficient knowledge. Otherwise, tell the caller to obtain the signature of a personal acquaintance.

(5) Remember to look at the person you are talking to. If writing, look up occasionally. It shows your interest, that you're human and that the interview is more than just routine. It helps if you are asked for identity details at some future time and it also enables you to pick up signals about how the interviewee is feeling. They may be confused, worried or angry. This will be missed if you do not look at them. This is the body language or 'non-verbal communication' and is an important aspect of interviewing skills.

(6) Do not enter into political discussion or argument.

The interview

An interview is a directed, purposeful conversation. Follow the chart shown overleaf.

If the person to be interviewed at the LO is accompanied, perhaps by a husband, wife, friend or relative, make the other person welcome. Be careful to address your questions to the claimant and to write down their answers. Do not ignore the other person. They may retaliate and impede the progress of the interview.

If the claimant is accompanied by two or more people, see COP 1601–1750.

If you call on someone in their home and they are not alone, check before you start the interview if they mind the third party being present. If they do, suggest moving to another room.

War Pensions

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of claimants of war pensions in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36346]

Mr. Heald: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he intends to take to reduce the waiting times for war pension claims and appeals to be processed. [38861]

Mr. Heald: This is a matter for Kevin Caldwell, chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from K. C. Caldwell to Mr. David Hanson, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the steps being taken to reduce the waiting times for war pension claims and appeals to be processed.

You may recall that in my letter to you dated 13 June 1996, in response to a previous Parliamentary Question (Official Report vol 279, col 332–333), I explained the many changes within the War Pensions Agency (WPA) in 1995 and how these had affected our performance.

The situation has improved since I wrote although our performance is still not as good as we would wish. We have taken the following steps to accelerate the improvement:

(i) We have examined the way in which we currently process appeals against the assessment of disablement. We believe that this can be improved with a consequent reduction in the time taken to prepare these appeals for hearing by Pensions Appeal Tribunal. We are currently testing the revised process to ensure that all parties, principally appellants and PAT members, are satisfied with the standard of service provided. As assessment appeals are the majority of all appeals received, this revised process would significantly reduce the time taken in clearing appeals.

(ii) We have created a taskforce within our operational group to address particular issues of process, organisation and resources and to identify and facilitate solutions.

(iii) We are in the process of recruiting a number of additional staff for a limited period to deal with the work currently awaiting action. As these staff need to receive training, it is anticipated that it will be September 1996 before this has a significant effect upon the current situation.

(iv) In the short term, we are committing additional resources, in the form of overtime, specifically to clearing claims and appeals. The results of this will quickly be apparent.

These steps are intended to reduce clearance times and the numbers of uncleared claims and appeals and ensure the Agency achieves the targets set by the Secretary of State for 1996–97.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many applicants, to date, have successfully claimed war widows' pension under revisions introduced in the Pensions Act 1995; [38109]

(2) what information was provided to claimants of war widows' pensions, following the change of legislation in 1995, on the impact of the backdating of benefits on means-tested benefits; and if he will make a statement. [38108]

(3) if he will make a statement on the average processing times for applications for war widows' pension, since the changes in regulations following the Pensions Act 1995. [38110]

Mr. Heald: These are matters for Kevin Caldwell, chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from K. C. Caldwell to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about restoration of War Widows Pensions (WWP).

I can confirm that to date a total of 14,586 widows have successfully applied to have their WWP reinstated under revisions introduced in the Pensions Act 1995.

As far as overlapping benefits are concerned it might be helpful if I explain that WWP overlaps with National Insurance (NI) benefits such as a Retirement Pension payable on the basis of a late husband's NI contributions or Incapacity Benefit and with income related benefits such as Income Support and Housing Benefit. £10 per week of a WWP is statutorily disregarded for the purposes of claims to income related benefits and where the war widow is in receipt of a Supplementary Pension, and the majority are, that statutory disregard is increased to £61.71 per week.

When making a claim for the restoration of a WWP, the widow is asked to complete a claim form which indicates that the award of a WWP might affect the amount of money received from other benefits. The claim form also explains that any arrears of WWP due may have to be reduced to take account of other benefits that have been paid.

In addition, when we notify the widow that her claim has been successful, we again advise her that the restored pension may affect the amount of money she can get from certain other benefits, and that we will have to make enquiries about these benefits.

The average processing time for applications for WWP, since the changes in regulations following the 1995 Pension Act, is 65 days (August 1995 to June 1996). The Secretary of State target for clearance of these cases is 80 per cent in 70 days. These figures do not include the war widows restoration exercise.

I do not have a ready means of calculating precisely the average clearance times for the restored WWP exercise. But I can tell you that the first formal claims began to be received in August 1995 and we were able to start notifying widows of the results from 22 September, by which time we had received 8,282 claims. To date we have received 14,814 claims and have made decisions on 14,719 of them.

Since the announcement of the intention to provide in the Pensions Bill for restoration of WWP, the Agency has had to set up new procedures and supporting material, train staff and reprogram our computer system to handle the claims. It was originally envisaged the Pensions Bill would receive Royal Assent in October 1995. However, Royal Assent was received on 19 July 1995, some 3 months earlier. The Agency set itself a target to clear the vast majority of claims by the end of March 1996 and, by 4 April 1996 of 13,847 claims received we had made decisions on 13,051.

The length of time taken to clear a claim very much depends on how much information the widow is able to supply at the time she claims, and whether we have to make additional enquiries. We have no arrears of work in this area, and currently we are notifying the results of claims made since the middle of June this year, ie less than 5 weeks ago.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

Pensioners

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list as a proportion of all pensioners those *(a)* pensioners, *(b)* single male pensioners aged under 75 years, *(c)* single female pensioners aged under 75 years, *(d)* single pensioners aged under 75 years, *(e)* pensioner couples aged under 75 years, *(f)* single male pensioners aged 75 years and over, *(g)* single female pensioners aged 75 years and over, *(h)* single pensioners aged 75 years and over and (i) pensioner couples where at least one partner is aged 75 years and over receiving income from savings; and if he will provide figures for the mean and median amount received for the latest year for which figures are available. [36258]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

	Proportion with investment income (per cent.)	*Mean amount for those in receipt (£ per week)*	*Median amount for those in receipt (£ per week)*
All pensioner units	73	37.40	8.70
Single male pensioners under 75	65	51.00	15.80
Single female pensioners under 75	70	29.40	5.90
Single pensioners under 75	69	33.90	7.40
Pensioner couples with head under 75	83	52.80	15.90
Single male pensioners 75 and over	73	38.10	6.50
Single female pensioners 75 and over	65	18.50	3.60

	Proportion with investment income (per cent.)	Mean amount for those in receipt (£ per week)	Median amount for those in receipt (£ per week)
Single pensioners 75 and over	67	22.60	4.40
Pensioner couples with head over 75	80	42.70	11.30

Notes:

1. These results are based on a relatively small sample size. Therefore they should be treated with a higher degree of caution than usual.
2. All amounts are in July 1993 prices.
3. Proportions are rounded to the nearest whole percentage, amounts are rounded to the nearest 10p.
4. A pensioner unit is defined as a single pensioner over State Pension Age (SPA) and a couple where the husband, or head, is over SPA. To provide consistency the age of the head has been used to define the age of the couple.

Source:

Information is based on the Family Expenditure Survey 1993.

National Insurance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many employers have qualified for exemption from national insurance contributions and how many qualifying employees were previously *(a)* unemployed, *(b)* on a training scheme, *(c)* carers and *(d)* lone parents. [36902]

Mr. Heald: From 6 April 1996 to 9 July 1996, the Contributions Agency issued 398 national insurance holiday deduction certificates to employers[1]. Of the 398 qualifying employees, 381 were unemployed[2], three were carers and 14 were lone parents.

Notes:

[1] The Contributions Agency has recorded 336 employers as having received one or more national insurance holiday deduction certificates. The numbers are less than the number of qualifying employees due to a combination of a short delay in recording employer details after the Contributions Agency has issued a certificate and because an employer may have taken on more than one qualifying employee.

[2] Includes people on a training scheme who are not identified separately for these purposes.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the effect on national insurance fund revenues in a full year of levying *(a)* a 2 per cent. employee contribution rate and *(b)* a 3 per cent. employer contribution rate on the earnings of employees with total earnings currently below the NIC lower earnings limit. [37595]

Mr. Heald: The estimated effects on national insurance fund revenue for 1997–98 are:

+ £ 95 million and + £100 million respectively.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list the number of people paying voluntary class 3 national insurance contributions for the most recent available year, and the number of these who are employed earners with earnings below the national insurance lower earnings limit, breaking the figures down by gender; [37594]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *418*, if he will estimate the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women with earnings below the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions who pay voluntary class 3 NICs. [37586]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

Number of people paying voluntary class 3 contributions for 1993–94

	Number
Men	111,000
Women	70,000
Total	181,000

Source:

One per cent. sample of national insurance records at February 1995. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be total contribution income for national insurance for 1995–96, 2000–01, 2010–11, 2020–21 and 2030–31, assuming *(a)* present contribution rates, *(b)* upper and lower earnings levels linked with earnings and *(c)* upper and lower earnings levels linked with earnings and the upper earnings level raised by 200 per cent. of average earnings, relative to current estimates of expenditure on benefits in those years. [38543]

Mr. Heald: The available information is in the tables.

Table A: National Insurance Fund: estimated contribution income [£ billion at 1994–95 prices] at present contribution rates for 1994–95, 2000–01, 2010–11, 2020–21 and 2030–31 as a percentage of estimated benefit expenditure [£ billion at 1994–95 prices] for those years

Year	1994–95	2000–01	2010–11	2020–21	2030–31
Income	36.4	45.1	55.1	64.0	69.6
Expenditure	39.9	42.2	50.8	56.4	63.8
Income as a percentage of expenditure	91	107	109	113	109

Table B: National Insurance Fund: estimated contribution income [£ billion at 1994–95 prices], assuming upper and lower earnings limits for Class 1 contributions linked with earnings, for 1994–95, 2000–01, 2010–11, 2020–21 and 2030–31 as a percentage of estimated benefit expenditure [£ billion at 1994–95 prices] for those years

Year	1994–95	2000–01	2010–11	2020–21	2030–31
Income	36.4	45.2	54.9	64.6	71.8
Expenditure	39.9	42.2	50.8	56.4	63.8
Income as a percentage of expenditure	91	107	108	114	113

Table C: National Insurance Fund: estimated contribution income [£ billion at 1994–95 prices], assuming upper and lower earnings limits for Class 1 contributions linked with earnings and the upper earnings limit raised to 200 per cent. of average earnings, for 1994–95, 2000–01, 2010–11, 2020–21 and 2030–31 as a percentage of estimated benefit expenditure [£ billion at 1994–95 prices] for those years

Year	1994–95	2000–01	2010–11	2020–21	2030–31
Income	38.1	47.3	57.6	67.7	75.2
Expenditure	39.9	42.2	50.8	56.4	63.8

Table C: National Insurance Fund: estimated contribution income [£ billion at 1994–95 prices], assuming upper and lower earnings limits for Class 1 contributions linked with earnings and the upper earnings limit raised to 200 per cent. of average earnings, for 1994–95, 2000–01, 2010–11, 2020–21 and 2030–31 as a percentage of estimated benefit expenditure [£ billion at 1994–95 prices] for those years

Year	1994–95	2000–01	2010–11	2020–21	2030–31
Income as a percentage of expenditure	96	112	113	120	118

Notes:

1. The information given in the tables has been derived from the Government Actuary's Reports on the Third Quinquennial Review under section 137 of the Social Security Act 1975 (HC 160) and on the Financial Provisions of the Pensions Bill 1994 (CM 2714) by:

adjusting the entries in table E3 and E4 of HC 160 so that the projected contribution income is based on a continuation of the 1994–95 combined Class 1 contribution rate (18.25%). Hence, the tables give information for 1994–95 rather than 1995–96;

adjusting contribution income for the years 2020–21 and 2030–31 to allow for the increased number of contributors expected as a result of the Pensions Act 1995;

adjusting the amounts of contracted-out rebate to allow for the difference between rebate rates assumed in HC 160 and those now expected.

2. For table (c), a further adjustment has been made to allow for the change in primary Class 1 contributions and rebates following from increasing the UEL to twice average earnings.

3. The estimated benefit expenditure information given in all three tables is that consistent with increasing the UEL and LEL in line with prices, even where (in tables (b) and (c)) the contribution income figures are based on increasing those limits in line with earnings, and allows for the effects of the Pensions Act 1995.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the Government Actuary's estimate of the excess of national insurance contribution income over outgoings for 1995–96 and for 1994–95, assuming actual rates of unemployment, excluding the Treasury grant and *(a)* excluding and *(b)* including the effects of contracted-out rebates, using the methodology set out in Cm 2445. [38542]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

£ billion

	1994–95	1995–96
(a) Excluding contracted-out rebates		
Contributions income	43.3	45.7
Benefit outgo	39.3	40.6
Excess/(shortfall)	4.0	5.1
(b) Including contracted-out rebates		
Contributions income	38.3	40.4
Benefit outgo	39.3	40.6
Personal pension rebates	2.0	2.0
Excess/(shortfall)	3.0	2.2

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the impact on revenue of an increase in the upper earnings limit for national insurance contributions by average earnings for the years 1995–96 and 1996–97. [39006]

Mr. Heald: Raising the upper earnings limit for 1995–96 and 1996–97 in line with the movement in average earnings would increase national insurance contribution revenue for each of those years by an estimated £50 million[1].

Source:

Government Actuary's Department

Note:

[1] This figure has been calculated by comparing the effects on national insurance contribution revenue of:

(i) a UEL for 1995/96 derived by applying the September 1993 to September 1994 4 per cent. increase in seasonally adjusted average earnings for all employees in GB [Table 5.1 of Labour Market Trends] to the UEL for 1994/95; and

(ii) a UEL for 1996/97 derived by applying the September 1994 to September 1995 3.1 per cent. increase in seasonally adjusted average earnings for all employees in GB [Table 5.1 of Labour Market Trends] to the unrounded result of (i);

and the actual UELs for those years.

Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a list showing the number, nature and value of contracts awarded by his Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton, BDO Stoy Hayward, Pannel Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996. [37316]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available.

Internet

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37242]

Mr. Burt: The Department will consider the simultaneous electronic publication of all important documents on a case-by-case basis, in line with the Government's policy on open government. We will shortly be releasing corporate home pages on the Internet. These will be in addition to home pages for some of our executive agencies.

Claims (Duration)

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average duration of a benefit claim in respect of *(a)* incapacity benefit, *(b)* severe disablement allowance, *(c)* invalid care allowance, *(d)* unemployment benefit, *(e)* income support where the claimant is unemployed, *(f)* income support where the claimant is a lone parent and *(g)* income support where a disability premium is payable. [36904]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the tables.

Table 1

Benefit	Average duration of claim
Sickness benefit/invalidity benefit[1]	1 year 5 months
Severe disablement allowance	7 years 11 months

Table 1

Benefit	*Average duration of claim*
Invalid care allowance[1]	2 years 6 months
Unemployment benefit[2]	20 weeks

Notes:

[1] Data are not yet available for incapacity benefit. Sickness benefit, invalidity benefit and invalid care allowance claim durations are based on all claims that terminated during the 1994–95 year. Data are derived from a clerical sample of 500 invalid care allowance cases, and from a 1 per cent. sample of sickness benefit and invalidity benefit cases.

[2] Durations for unemployment benefit and income support are calculated from the number of live claims at a given point in time: for unemployment benefit this is 10 August 1995, for income support 25 August 1995. The unemployment benefit data are derived from a 5 per cent. sample of cases.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistics Enquiry August 1995.

Table 2: Income support[1] claim duration

	Number of cases (000)	*Percentage on benefit for:* *Under 1 year*	*1–2 years*	*2–3 years*	*3 years or over*
Unemployed	1,710	51.5	16.2	8.8	23.5
Disabled	737	12.8	15.2	12.4	59.6
Lone parents	1,074	23.2	15.9	12.9	48.0

Note:

[1] It is not possible to calculate the average duration of income support claims as no reliable information is available on durations of claims for those people who have been in receipt of income support for relatively long periods. A full explanation is given in the introduction to the 1993 annual statistical enquiry, a copy of which is in the Library.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistics Enquiry August 1995.

Income Support

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many new claims have been made for income support where the claimant has liability for a mortgage since October 1995; and how many of these have been treated as existing claims where the claimant *(a)* is a carer, *(b)* has been refused payments under a mortgage protection policy because of a pre-existing condition or because he or she is HIV positive, *(c)* is a lone parent and *(d)* is a remand prisoner. [37423]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

The changes that were introduced in October 1995 differentiated between loans taken out before 2 October 1995 (existing housing costs) and loans taken out after that date (new housing costs). Claimants in the above groups who have new housing costs have them treated as if they were existing housing costs.

The number of claimants who claimed income support for mortgage interest since October 1995, and who were still in receipt in March 1996—the latest available figure—was 73,000, of whom 71,000 had existing housing costs. The remaining 2,000 claimants had new housing costs, some of whom were treated as existing housing costs because they belonged to one of the specified groups.

Changes of Circumstances

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average number of changes of circumstances over a period of *(a)* three months and *(b)* six months for claims in respect of each of (i) incapacity benefit, (ii) severe disablement allowance, (iii) invalid care allowance, (iv) unemployment benefit, (v) income support where the claimant is unemployed, (vi) income support where the claimant is a lone parent and (vii) income support where a disability premium is payable. [36905]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Benefit	*Average number of change of circumstances per customer:* *January–March 1996*[1]	*January–June 1996*[2]
Income support	1.25	2.29
Invalid care allowance	0.93	1.82

[1] Derived from income support live load figures for February 1996 and invalid care allowance live load for March 1996.

[2] Derived from income support live load figures for May 1996 and invalid care allowance live load for June 1996.

1. All live load information is a snapshot of the number of cases at a point in time. The income support live load is counted quarterly, invalid care allowance live load monthly.

Statutory Sick and Maternity Pay

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of employers he estimates will be able to recover payments of statutory sick pay under the percentage threshold scheme in 1995–96; and what percentage and amount of total spending on statutory sick pay he estimates will be borne by employers as a result. [37593]

Mr. Heald: It is estimated that around 43 per cent. of firms paying statutory sick pay were able to recover some portion of their SSP payments under the percentage threshold scheme in 1995–96.

The Government Actuary's Department estimated that in 1995–96 employers would meet around 97 per cent. of the overall cost of paying SSP to employees. This amounted to £845 million.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the percentage of employers who are able fully to recover payments of statutory maternity pay; and what proportion and amount of total SMP payments is borne by employers. [37592]

Mr. Heald: It is estimated that around 38 per cent. of firms paying statutory maternity pay were able to recover payments of SMP in full in 1995–96.

The Government Actuary's Department estimated that employers would meet around 7 per cent. of the cost of

paying SMP to their employees in 1995–96. This amounted to around £35 million.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the average annual amounts and duration of statutory sick pay for male and female workers and the average amount and earnings-related amount of statutory maternity pay paid to female workers using data for 1992–93 from the Lifetime labour market database. [37591]

Mr. Heald: The information relating to statutory sick pay is in the table:

1992–93	*Average amount of SSP payment £*	*Average duration (days)*
Men	[1]175	[1,2]17
Women	[1]163	[1,2]16

The estimated average amount of statutory maternity pay (SMP) paid to women in 1992–93 is £1,200[1]. The earnings related element is estimated to be £700[1,3].

[1] All figures taken from a 1 per cent. sample of SSP and SMP payments made in the UK.

[2] Figures estimated on the assumption that the standard working week is five days, and that higher rate statutory sick pay is in payment.

[3] Estimated by taking 90 per cent. of total pay and converting to weekly figure. Assumes that every payment of SMP is for a six-week period. Pay used for this estimate may not be for the same period as that used originally to calculate SMP.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the percentage of female employees who received statutory maternity pay or maternity allowance in the most recent available year. [37589]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

It is estimated that around 1 per cent. of female employees at spring 1994 were in receipt of statutory maternity pay or maternity allowance.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the percentage of employees who received statutory sick pay or sickness benefit in the most recent available year. [37588]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

It is estimated that around 2 per cent. of employees at spring 1994 were in receipt of statutory sick pay or sickness benefit.

Out-of-hours Service

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how much his Department will save annually on the new proposals to close the out-of-hours service in October; [37558]

(2) what arrangements are being made for the public for out-of-hours contact with the Benefits Agency. [37559]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking how much his Department will save annually on the new proposals to close the Out of Hours Service (OOHS) in October and what arrangements are being made for the public for out of hours contact with the Benefits Agency.

I recently outlined the BA's plans for the future delivery of social security benefits based on the Benefit Agency vision of "right money to the right person at the right time, every time".

The Agency will carry out a wide-ranging review of its activities as part of the Departmental Change Programme. Such a programme of change will cover all fundamental areas of the organisation's business and we are committed to achieve a 25% improvement in our productivity by 1998/99. In the first year it has been necessary to identify efficiencies and economies in excess of £200 million. All efficiencies and economies have been considered alongside the expenditure priorities the Agency has been set.

It is against this background that the Agency decided to review the need for the OOHS which provides a service to customers at night and weekends. A decision on its viability is expected later this year and it is not possible to say at this time what savings, if any, might be made.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Freeline

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the abolition of the DSS freeline. [37580]

Mr. Roger Evans: I have received 81 representations from hon. Members and six representations from members of the public.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he is taking to ensure that staff in local offices have the necessary expertise to *(a)* provide an overview of services and benefits available, *(b)* offer advice about maximising benefit entitlement and *(c)* deal with the other types of inquiries previously dealt with by the freeline; and what plans he has to ensure that these services are quickly and readily available to telephone callers. [37581]

Mr. Evans: The provision of advice on benefits is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what action he is taking to ensure that staff in local offices have the necessary expertise to (a) provide an overview of services and benefits available, (b) offer advice about maximising benefit entitlement and (c) deal with the other types of inquiries previously dealt with by the Freeline; and what plans he has to ensure that these services are quickly and readily available to telephone callers.

The Benefits Agency (BA) is working towards a vision to provide an efficient service which offers reliable advice and pays the right money to the right person, at the right time, every time. The BA Customer Service Requirement issued in April this year was developed to establish a minimum level of customer service throughout the Agency. These minimum standards are displayed in all public caller areas. The BA customer charter also sets out the standards of service that have to be provided by the BA.

Staff in local offices receive guidance on the full range of benefits as part of their initial and ongoing training and development. Staff have access to benefit computer systems and individual customer details, and are well placed to advise callers accurately on their entitlement to benefit.

All staff have been made aware of the closure of Freeline. Any callers who may have contacted Freeline previously will be referred either to a section able to deal with general enquiries or to a relevant expert on a particular benefit. All BA offices have access to the Integrated Benefit Information System which staff can use to provide general benefit advice.

The BA has made considerable investment in its telephone services and infrastructure over the last two and half years and by October 1996 all sites will have Direct Dial facilities. This will improve access for customers and reduce costs.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what sources of help will be available for clients following the closure of the Benefits Agency freephone advice line; and if he will make a statement. [38329]

Mr. Evans: This is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what sources of help will be available for clients following the closure of the Benefits Agency freephone advice line; and if he will make a statement.

Following the closure of Freeline help and advice will be available for customers through the Agency's network of local benefit offices. The closure of Freeline will allow resources to be refocused so that the customer is in touch with the staff who administer their claims or who can directly link the benefits available with the specific personal details of the customer.

Benefit literature is readily available in local offices, post offices and numerous other outlets.

Customers with disabilities may still ring the Benefit Enquiry Line free of charge for help and advice.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many telephone inquiries the Benefits Agency freephone advice line has received in each month since January; and if he will provide a breakdown of the nature of the advice requested. [38328]

Mr. Evans: This is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many telephone enquiries his Benefits Agency (BA) freephone advice line has received in each month since January; and if he will provide a breakdown of the nature of the advice requested.

The information is not available in the format requested. The number of calls received has been taken to mean the number of calls answered by an adviser. Due to the confidentiality of the Freeline service records were not kept about the nature of the advice sought or provided. However, research for the BA's National Customer Survey 1995 indicated that 37% of customers telephoned Freeline to find out about eligibility, 25% for general information and 29% for issues relating to individual benefit enquiries.

The number of calls answered are shown in the table below:

1996	*Number*
January	215,546
February	238,494
March	290,787
April	231,067
May	293,542
June	223,692
July (up to 12 July)	59,957

Figures are provisional and subject to change. I hope you find this reply helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans his Department has to monitor the effects of the closure of the national Benefits Agency inquiry freeline on the take-up of income-related benefits. [39232]

Mr. Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what plans his Department has to monitor the effects of the closure of the national Benefits Agency Enquiry Freeline on the take-up of income related benefits.

In my letter dated 3 July I explained it was not anticipated that the closure of Freeline would have any material impact on the take up of income related benefits.

There was no monitoring of the take up of income related benefits when Freeline was open and there are currently no plans to monitor the take up now Freeline has closed.

Thank you for allowing me to explain the position.

State Earnings-related Pensions

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the additional cost in cash terms to public funds in 1996–97 in respect of pensions if the 1979 SERPS rules still applied. [37582]

Mr. Heald: The only changes to the SERPS rules which have come into effect since 1979 relate to the calculation of the amount deducted from gross additional pension in respect of post-April 1988 periods of contracted-out employment. It is estimated that expenditure is £60 million higher in 1996–97 as a result. The remaining changes under the Social Security Act 1986 will be implemented from April 1999 onwards and those under the Pensions Act 1995 from April 1997 onwards.

Performance Targets

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the performance targets for each social security office and area in the county of Tyne and Wear for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97; how many of those targets were achieved in 1995–96, in each case indicating how those targets and achievements relate to those set nationally. [37563]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the tables:

Benefit Agency: Districts and offices within Tyne Tees Area Directorate

District	*Offices*
Newcastle	Newcastle St JamesNewcastle East
North Durham	Durham Chester le Street Peterlee Seaham Stanley
Northumberland	Ashington Berwick Blyth Hexham
North Tees	Stockton Hartlepool
North Tyneside	North Shields Wallsend
South Durham	Bishop Auckland Darlington
South Tees	Middlesbrough Eston Redcar
South Tyneside	Gateshead Jarrow South Shields
Wearside	Houghton le Spring Sunderland North Sunderland South

Benefits agency—Secretary of State targets

Target area	*1995–96 target: National, area and district*	*1996–97 target: National, area and district*
Income support claims		
Primary	63 per cent. in 5 days	63 per cent. in 5 days
Secondary	87 per cent. in 13 days	87 per cent. in 13 days
Incapacity benefit claims		
Primary	65 per cent. in 10 days	65 per cent. in 10 days
Secondary	85 per cent. in 30 days	85 per cent. in 30 days
Social fund crisis loans[1]	On the day the need arises	On the day the need arises
Income support accuracy	87 per cent.	87 per cent.
Short term benefit accuracy	94 per cent.	94 per cent.

[1] Target considered met if 95 per cent. of claims are cleared within one day.

Benefits Agency: Secretary of State targets—1995–96 achievement

Percentage

Target	*National*	*Tyne Tees area*	*Newcastle*	*North Durham*	*Northumberland*	*North Tees*	*North Tyne*	*South Durham*	*South Tees*	*South Tyne*	*Wearside*
Income support claims											
Primary	67.1	70.7	74.4	70.1	72.4	70.5	71.5	69.4	65.7	71.9	70.7
Secondary	88.2	90.9	92.5	90.7	92.2	91.4	91.6	90.0	88.3	90.4	90.9
Incapacity benefit claims											
Primary	78.9	80.1	76.1	79.8	83.3	83.5	78.3	80.2	81.3	78.9	80.2
Secondary	96.0	97.0	96.4	97.4	97.7	97.5	95.9	96.4	96.8	96.4	97.7
Social fund crisis loans	97.4	98.2	98.4	99.4	98.6	98.0	98.8	98.5	96.5	98.3	98.1
Income support accuracy	78.1	80.6	83.3	78.0	84.5	85.0	66.7	78.3	81.0	86.7	81.7
Short term benefit (STB) accuracy[1]	90.7	91.8	—	93.2	—	—	—	—	90.6	—	—

[1] Only North Durham and South Tees districts within Tyne Tees area visited by the STB accuracy checking team in 1995–96.

Benefits Agency: Secretary of State financial targets—1995–96 and 1996–97 and achievements 1995–96

Targets/ achievements	*National*	*Tyne Tees area*	*Newcastle*	*North Durham*	*Northumberland*	*North Tees*	*North Tyne*	*South Durham*	*South Tees*	*South Tyne*	*Wearside*
Social fund recovery											
1995–96 target	£273m	£16.46m	£2.20m	£1.90m	£1.10m	£1.70m	£0.92m	£1.54m	£2.36m	£2.37m	£2.35m
1995–96 achievement	£263.5m	£15.62m	£1.97m	£1.81m	£1.04m	£1.58m	£0.98m	£1.41m	£2.28m	£2.30m	£2.23m
1996–97 target	£278m	£16.26m	£2.16m	£1.85m	£1.08m	£1.68m	£1.01m	£1.47m	£2.33m	£2.38m	£2.30m
Social fund expenditure[1]											
1995–96 target	£406m	£24.01m	£3.21m	£2.74m	£1.61m	£2.51m	£1.54m	£2.13m	£3.48m	£3.47m	£3.31m
1995–96 achievement	£401m	£23.77m	£3.21m	£2.67m	£1.57m	£2.47m	£1.51m	£2.12m	£3.48m	£3.45m	£3.29m
1996–97 target	£419.5m	£24.72m	£3.38m	£2.87m	£1.70m	£2.64m	£1.55m	£2.15m	£3.50m	£3.60m	£3.33m
Benefit savings (fraud)											
1995–96 target	£680m	£43.05m	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1995–96 achievement	£715.6m	£44.71m	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1996–97 target[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Benefits Agency: Secretary of State financial targets—1995–96 and 1996–97 and achievements 1995–96

Targets/ achievements	National	Tyne Tees area	Newcastle	North Durham	Northumberland	North Tees	North Tyne	South Durham	South Tees	South Tyne	Wearside
Overpayments											
1995–96 target	£110m	£4.03m	[4]—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1995–96 achievement	£112m	£4.58m	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1996–97 target	£91.5m	£3.31m	£428k	£429k	£270k	£338k	£212k	£305k	£416k	£490k	£418k

[1] The social fund expenditure target is "to keep to the cash limit agreement with Treasury for the discretionary social fund budget approved by Parliament."
[2] From 1996–97 benefit savings (fraud) are included in the new security target.
[3] No 1995–96 or 1996–97 target or performance data available at district level.
[4] No overpayment recovery target or performance data available at district level in 1995–96.

Contributions Agency—1995/96 Secretary of State targets and achievements

SOS target	National target	National performance	Divisional[1] target	Division/regional performance
Class 1 survey	93,200	94,166	3,320	7,233
Educational survey	23,300	29,113	664	2,325
Class 1 arrears identified	£133,000,000	£151,761,233	£3,312,576	£10,153,268
Collectable new class 2	40,000	39,791	1,265	3,685
Customer enquiries	95 per cent.	98.6 per cent.	95 per cent.	98.17 per cent.

All targets were achieved except for the collectable new class 2.
[1] Northumberland, Durham and Teeside Division includes all locations in the county of Tyne and Wear.

Contributions Agency—1996–97 Secretary of State targets

SOS target	National target	Northern regional[1] target
Collection of contribution arrears	£65 million	Not distributed to regions
Identification of class 1 arrears	£150 million	£9.612 million
New class 2 identified	40,000	3,436
Customer enquiries	95 per cent.	95 per cent.

[1] Northern Region includes the current locations in Tyne and Wear.

Child Support Agency—1995–96 and 1996–97 Secretary of State targets and 1995–96 achievement

	Maintenance assessment clearance times	
Secretary of State target	*National performance*	*Falkirk CSAC[1] performance*
1995–96		
60 per cent. of new maintenance applications to be cleared within 26 weeks and as at 31 March 1996 no more than 10 per cent. of all maintenance applications received by the Agency to be over 52 weeks old.As at 31 March 1996, 48 per cent. of maintenance applications had been cleared within 26 weeks and 15 per cent. of maintenance applications received were over 52 weeks old.	As at 31 March 1996, 51 per cent. of maintenance applications had been cleared within 26 weeks and 19 per cent. of maintenance applications received were over 52 weeks old.	
1996–97		
60 per cent. of new maintenance applications to be cleared within 26 weeks and as at 31 March 1997, no more than 10 per cent. of all maintenance applications received by the Agency to be over 52 weeks old.	n/a	n/a

[1] Work initially processed in offices in the county of Tyne and Wear is sent to the Agency's centre in Falkirk for continued action.
n/a = not available.

Retirement Pension

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the additional cost to public funds in cash terms in 1996–97 of the basic retirement pension, if pensions had been indexed to wages for the last 25 years. [37578]

Mr. Heald: The additional cost to public funds if the basic pension had been uprated by average earnings over the last 25 years is estimated to be £5.2 billion per annum in 1996–97 (cash prices).

Notes:

1. The additional cost is net of the effect on income-related benefits.

2. The cost is calculated on a basic state pension in 1996–97 being:

Cat A: £76.10

Cat BL: £47.70

Source:

Average earnings index (whole economy, all earnings, unadjusted). The Abstract of Statistics for Social Security Benefits and Contributions and Indices of Prices and Earnings. Uprating rounding convention has been followed in calculating benefit rates.

The estimate is based on the expenditure figures shown in the departmental report, Cm 3213, for basic retirement pensions. It does not include the effect on those benefits normally paid at the same rate as basic retirement pension or other benefits paid to people over pension age.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the Government Actuary's estimate of the average lump sum investment required in an annuity to provide a personal pension equivalent to the basic retirement pension at 65 years for people aged 25, 35, 45 and 55 years today, assuming that the pension is related *(a)* only to prices and *(b)* to earnings at 1.5 per cent. per annum. [38541]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

Estimated lump sum investment required in an annuity to provide a personal pension equivalent to the basic retirement pension at 65 years

£

Age	(a) Prices		(b) Earnings at 1.5 per cent.	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
25	13,000	15,500	27,000	32,500
35	17,500	20,500	31,000	37,500
45	23,500	27,500	35,500	43,000
55	31,000	37,000	41,000	49,500

Source:
Government Actuary's Department.
Notes:
1. The table indicates the estimated lump sum payments if:

Column (a): the current basic retirement pension for a single person of £61.15 per week were to be increased in future in line with the retail prices index; or

Column (b): the current basic retirement pension for a single person of £61.15 per week were to be increased in future in line with the index of national average earnings, which has been assumed to increase by 1.5 per cent. per annum over the increase in the retail prices index.

2. The assumptions underlying these estimates are consistent with those adopted for the purpose of the Government Actuary's March 1996 review of the National Insurance rebates for persons contracted-out of the State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme through Appropriate Personal Pension Schemes for the five year period commencing on 6 April 1997 (Cm 3221).

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the weekly state basic and earnings-related pensions payable to men and women on average earnings and half average earnings reaching pension age in each year from 1996 to 2040, in cash terms and as a percentage of their pre-retirement earnings. [37884]

Mr. Heald *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The information is set out in the tables.

Table 1: Cash prices

Year of retirement (i.e. year of reaching State pension age)	Male average earnings				½ male average earnings			
	Basic retirement pension (RP) (£ per week)	As a percentage of pre-retirement earnings	Additional pension (AP) (£ per week)	As a percentage of pre-retirement earnings	Basic retirement pension (RP) (£ per week)	As a percentage of pre-retirement earnings	Additional pension (AP) (£ per week)	As a percentage of pre-retirement earnings
1996	61.15	16	77.40	20	61.15	32	32.20	17
1997	64.20	16	83.40	21	64.20	32	34.50	17
1998	67.40	16	91.20	21	67.40	32	37.60	18
1999	70.80	16	96.80	21	70.80	31	40.00	18
2000	74.35	15	99.90	21	74.35	31	40.10	17
2001	78.05	15	105.30	21	78.05	30	42.30	16
2002	81.95	15	110.90	20	81.95	30	44.60	16
2003	86.05	15	116.70	20	86.05	30	47.00	16
2004	90.35	15	122.70	20	90.35	29	49.50	16
2005	94.85	14	128.90	19	94.85	29	52.10	16
2006	99.60	14	135.40	19	99.60	28	54.80	16
2007	104.60	14	142.00	19	104.60	28	57.50	15
2008	109.80	14	148.80	19	109.80	27	60.40	15
2009	115.30	14	155.70	18	115.30	27	63.40	15
2010	121.05	13	165.40	18	121.05	27	67.60	15
2011	127.15	13	175.70	18	127.15	26	72.00	15
2012	133.50	13	186.60	18	133.50	26	76.80	15
2013	140.15	13	198.10	18	140.15	25	81.90	15
2014	147.15	13	210.40	18	147.15	25	87.40	15

Table 1: Cash prices

Year of retirement (i.e. year of reaching State pension age)	Male average earnings				½ male average earnings			
	Basic retirement pension (RP) (£ per week)	As a percentage of pre-retirement earnings	Additional pension (AP) (£ per week)	As a percentage of pre-retirement earnings	Basic retirement pension (RP) (£ per week)	As a percentage of pre-retirement earnings	Additional pension (AP) (£ per week)	As a percentage of pre-retirement earnings
2015	154.50	12	223.30	18	154.50	25	93.20	15
2016	162.25	12	237.00	18	162.25	24	99.40	15
2017	170.35	12	251.50	18	170.35	24	106.00	15
2018	178.90	12	266.80	18	178.90	24	113.10	15
2019	187.80	12	283.10	18	187.80	23	120.70	15
2020	197.20	11	300.30	17	197.20	23	128.80	15
2021	207.10	11	318.60	17	207.10	23	137.40	15
2022	217.45	11	337.90	17	217.45	22	146.60	15
2023	228.30	11	358.40	17	228.30	22	156.40	15
2024	239.70	11	380.10	17	239.70	22	166.90	15
2025	251.70	11	403.10	17	251.70	21	178.10	15
2026	264.30	10	427.80	17	264.30	21	190.10	15
2027	277.50	10	453.30	17	277.50	21	202.90	15
2028	291.40	10	478.00	17	291.40	20	216.10	15
2029	305.95	10	503.10	16	305.95	20	229.80	15
2030	321.25	10	529.20	16	321.25	20	244.40	15
2031	337.30	10	557.80	16	337.30	19	260.50	15
2032	354.15	10	587.90	16	354.15	19	277.80	15
2033	371.90	9	619.70	16	371.90	19	296.40	15
2034	390.45	9	653.10	16	390.45	19	316.30	15
2035	410.00	9	687.80	15	410.00	18	337.30	15
2036	430.50	9	724.20	15	430.50	18	359.80	15
2037	452.00	9	761.50	15	452.00	18	383.40	15
2038	474.60	9	804.80	15	474.60	18	410.20	15
2039	498.35	9	850.30	15	498.35	17	438.90	15
2040	523.25	9	897.60	15	523.25	17	469.30	15

Table 2: Cash prices

Year of retirement (i.e. year of reaching State pension age)	Female average earnings				½ female average earnings			
	Basic retirement pension (RP) (£ per week)	As a percentage of pre-retirement earnings	Additional pension (AP) (£ per week)	As a percentage of pre-retirement earnings	Basic retirement pension (RP) (£ per week)	As a percentage of pre-retirement earnings	Additional pension (AP) (£ per week)	As a percentage of pre-retirement earnings
1996	61.15	22	47.70	17	61.15	44	17.30	13
1997	64.20	22	51.50	18	64.20	45	18.50	13
1998	67.40	22	56.50	18	67.40	44	20.20	13
1999	70.80	22	60.30	18	70.80	43	21.80	13
2000	74.35	21	61.60	18	74.35	43	20.90	12
2001	78.05	21	65.20	18	78.05	42	22.20	12
2002	81.95	21	68.80	17	81.95	42	23.60	12
2003	86.05	20	72.60	17	86.05	41	25.00	12
2004	90.35	20	76.60	17	90.35	40	26.40	12
2005	94.85	20	80.60	17	94.85	40	27.90	12
2006	99.60	20	84.90	17	99.60	39	29.50	12
2007	104.60	19	89.20	16	104.60	39	31.10	11
2008	109.80	19	93.70	16	109.80	38	32.80	11
2009	115.30	19	98.40	16	115.30	37	34.50	11
2010	121.05	18	105.00	16	121.05	37	37.00	11
2011	127.15	18	112.00	16	127.15	36	39.60	11
2012	133.50	18	119.50	16	133.50	36	42.40	11
2013	140.15	18	127.50	16	140.15	35	45.40	11
2014	147.15	17	136.00	16	147.15	35	48.60	11
2015	154.50	17	145.10	16	154.50	34	52.10	11
2016	162.25	17	154.80	16	162.25	34	55.80	12
2017	170.35	17	165.20	16	170.35	33	59.70	12
2018	178.90	16	176.30	16	178.90	33	63.90	12
2019	187.80	16	188.10	16	187.80	32	68.40	12
2020	197.20	16	200.70	16	197.20	32	73.20	12
2021	207.10	16	214.20	16	207.10	31	78.40	12
2022	217.45	15	228.50	16	217.45	31	83.90	12
2023	228.30	15	243.80	16	228.30	30	89.80	12
2024	239.70	15	260.20	16	239.70	30	96.10	12
2025	251.70	15	277.60	16	251.70	30	102.90	12
2026	264.30	15	296.30	16	264.30	29	110.10	12

Table 2: Cash prices

Year of retirement (i.e. year of reaching State pension age)	Female average earnings				½ female average earnings			
	Basic retirement pension (RP) (£ per week)	As a percentage of pre-retirement earnings	Additional pension (AP) (£ per week)	As a percentage of pre-retirement earnings	Basic retirement pension (RP) (£ per week)	As a percentage of pre-retirement earnings	Additional pension (AP) (£ per week)	As a percentage of pre-retirement earnings
2027	277.50	14	316.10	16	277.50	29	117.80	12
2028	291.40	14	337.40	16	291.40	28	126.70	12
2029	305.95	14	359.60	16	305.95	28	136.00	12
2030	321.25	14	382.90	16	321.25	27	145.70	12
2031	337.30	14	408.20	16	337.30	27	156.60	13
2032	354.15	13	435.20	16	354.15	27	168.30	13
2033	371.90	13	463.80	16	371.90	26	180.80	13
2034	390.45	13	494.20	16	390.45	26	194.40	13
2035	410.00	13	526.10	16	410.00	25	208.70	13
2036	430.50	13	560.00	16	430.50	25	224.10	13
2037	452.00	12	595.20	16	452.00	25	240.20	13
2038	474.60	12	634.90	16	474.60	24	258.20	13
2039	498.35	12	676.80	16	498.35	24	277.30	13
2040	523.25	12	720.70	16	523.25	24	297.60	13

1. All amounts are in cash prices. Amounts of AP are rounded to the nearest 10p, amounts of RP are rounded to the nearest 5p and percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.
2. Average earnings figures are taken from New Earnings Survey 1995.
3. The above estimates are prepared by the Government Actuary's Department (GAD) using the following assumptions:
Treasury forecast was used for the current year. Thereafter GAD have used an illustrative assumption of 5 per cent. per annum.
Earnings rise by 1.5 per cent. higher than prices.
Individuals are contracted in to the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme throughout.
Pre-retirement earnings are taken as estimated earnings in the year prior to retirement.
Changes introduced in the Pensions Act 1995 have been taken into account.

Allowances

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of people who have suffered a reduction in the reduced earnings allowance with the introduction of the retirement allowance in *(a)* the benefit offices covering Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* the United Kingdom. [37873]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

As at 1 April 1995 there were approximately 985 people receiving retirement allowance in Wales and 10,700 in Great Britain. In order to assess those who will be transferred to retirement allowance under the amended legislation which came into force on 24 March, the Benefits Agency has identified all remaining reduced earnings allowance recipients who are over pensionable age. About 350 such recipients were identified within the area administered by the Eastern Valleys district, about 1,900 in Wales and about 20,000 in Great Britain.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all decisions relating to *(a)* the special hardship allowance and *(b)* the reduced earnings allowance by the hearings of *(a)* the commission, *(b)* the tribunal and *(c)* the divisional court. [37874]

Mr. Evans: The information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeals have been lodged against a disallowance of incapacity benefit in the Coventry benefits district in each quarter since April 1995; how many of these have been from *(a)* new incapacity benefit claimants and *(b)* former claimants of invalidity benefit; in each case, how many appeals have been (i) disallowed, (ii) superseded and (iii) found in the claimant's favour; and how many are outstanding. [37853]

Mr. Burt: The administration of incapacity benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Robert Ainsworth, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliament Question asking how many appeals have been lodged against a disallowance of Incapacity Benefit (IB) in the Coventry benefits district in each quarter since April 1995; how many of these have been from (a) new IB claimants and (b) former claimants of Invalidity Benefit (IVB); in each case, how many appeals have been (i) disallowed, (ii) superseded and (iii) found in the claimant's favour; and how many are outstanding.

The information is not available in the format requested. Statistics are kept for disallowances relating to the all Work Test only. A breakdown of customers formerly in receipt of IVB and customers claiming IB on or after 13 April 1995 is not available as such statistics are not kept.

Such information as is available is shown in the attached table.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Total number of IB appeals against the All Work Test disallowance for the Coventry Benefits Agency (BA) District

Quarter ending	June 1995	September 1995	December 1995	March 1995
Number of appeals lodged	0	35	79	113
Number where BA decision upheld	0	0	5	22

Total number of IB appeals against the All Work Test disallowance for the Coventry Benefits Agency (BA) District

Quarter ending	*June 1995*	*September 1995*	*December 1995*	*March 1995*
Number of cases superseded	0	3	3	4
Number where decision in favour of appellant	0	0	17	38
Number of cases outstanding at end of each quarter	0	32	86	135

Notes:
Number of cases include both customer's formerly in receipt of IVB and customer's claiming IB on or after 13 April 1995, a breakdown of the two is not available.
Number of cases outstanding is a cumulative figure at the end of each quarter
Data are provisional and subject to amendment.

Mr. Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently receiving incapacity benefit in the Coventry benefits district; and how many of these were formerly in receipt of invalidity benefit. [37850]

Mr. Burt: The administration of incapacity benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Robert Ainsworth, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people are currently receiving Incapacity Benefit (IB) in the Coventry Benefits District; and how many of these were formerly in receipt of Invalidity Benefit (IVB).

The number of people in receipt of IB in the Coventry District, on 29 February 1996, was 10,800, of which 7,500 were formerly in receipt of IVB. This figure excludes a small number of clerically processed cases and it is provisional and subject to amendment.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many new claims for incapacity benefit have been made in the Coventry benefits district since April 1995; how many of these were refused to the Benefits Agency medical service; and how many of these were subsequently *(a)* allowed and *(b)* disallowed by reason of (i) failing the all-work test, (ii) failing to attend the medical examination and (iii) failing to return the IB50 questionnaire; [37851]

(2) how many claimants formerly in receipt of invalidity benefit in the Coventry benefits district were referred to the Benefits Agency medical service in each quarter since April 1995; and how many of these were subsequently *(a)* transferred to incapacity benefit and *(b)* disallowed by reason of (i) failing the all-work test, (ii) failing to attend the medical examination and (iii) failing to return the IB50 questionnaire. [37852]

Mr. Burt: The administration of incapacity benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Robert Ainsworth, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking how many new claims for Incapacity Benefit (IB) have been made in the Coventry Benefits District since April 1995; how many of these were referred to the Benefits Agency Medical Service (BAMS); and how many of these were subsequently (a) allowed and (b) disallowed by reason of (i) failing the all work test, (ii) failing to attend the medical examination and (iii) failing to return the IB50 questionnaire; and how many claimants formerly in receipt of Invalidity Benefit (IVB) in the Coventry Benefits District were referred to the BAMS in each quarter since April 1995; and how many of these were subsequently (a) transferred to incapacity benefit and (b) disallowed by reason of (i) failing the all work test, (ii) failing to attend the medical examination and (iii) failing to return the IB50 questionnaire.

The information is not available in the format requested. The statistics kept do not differentiate between customers formerly in receipt of IVB and customers claiming IB on or after 13 April 1995.

The attached table gives details of the information available.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Total number of claims received for the Benefits Agency (BA) Coventry District

Quarter ending	*June 1995*	*September 1995*	*December 1995*	*March 1996*
	1,342	1,467	1,282	1,281

Total number of cases following the All Work Test process for the BA Coventry District

Quarter ending	*June 1995*	*September 1995*	*December 1995*	*March 1996*
Cases referred to BAMS	1,358	1,744	1,350	1,710
Cases allowed following BAMS referral	188	538	777	1,350
Cases disallowed IB as:				
(*a*) failed the all work test	0	68	126	164
(*b*) failed to attend the medical examination	0	0	3	6
(*c*) failed to return the IB50 questionnaire	8	6	3	15
Credits only cases disallowed	0	6	32	77

Notes:
Number of cases include both customer's formerly in receipt of IVB and customer's claiming IB on or after 13 April 1995, a breakdown of the two is not available.
Source: 100 per cent. count of cases held on the IB system and does exclude a small number of clerically processed cases.
The number of credits only cases disallowed is not available broken down into the three categories of disallowance only a total figure is available.
Data are provisional and subject to amendment.

Mr. Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many appeals have been lodged against a disallowance of incapacity benefits in Coventry benefits district in each quarter since April 1995, how many of these have been from *(a)* new incapacity benefits claimants and *(b)* former claimants of invalidity benefits; in each case, how many appeals have been (i) disallowed, (ii) superseded and (iii) found in the claimants' favour; and how many are outstanding; [39707]

(2) how many claims for incapacity benefits have been made in the Coventry benefits district since April 1995; how many of these were referred to the Benefits Agency medical service; and how many of these were subsequently *(a)* allowed and *(b)* disallowed by reason of (i) failing the all-work test, (ii) failing to attend the medical examination and (iii) failing to return the IB50 questionnaire; [39709]

(3) how many people are currently receiving incapacity benefits in Coventry benefits district; and how many of these were formerly in receipt of invalidity benefit; [39708]

(4) how many people who have been disallowed incapacity benefits in the Coventry benefits district in each quarter since April 1995 are *(a)* currently signing on as unemployed, *(b)* claiming unemployment benefits and *(c)* have started work. [39706]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, Peter Mathison, on 23 July 1996.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a breakdown by age, sex and region of those claiming benefit due to medical incapacity on 1 April 1989 and on subsequent 1 Aprils distinguishing between those only receiving national insurance credits and those claiming direct payments of incapacity benefit. [38155]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available has been placed in the Library.

Family Credit

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in *(a)* the south-west region, *(b)* the county of Dorset and *(c)* each district in Dorset were in receipt of family credit in each of the last five financial years. [38165]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of family credit is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mrs. Diana Maddock, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people in the South West Region, the County of Dorset and in each district of Dorset were in receipt of Family Credit (FC) in each of the last five financial years.

The information is not available in the format requested. The FC computer system holds records of the total number of claims received, awarded and disallowed on a national basis.

Statistics are not kept which are specific to the South West Region or individual towns or areas. However, statistics are available which indicate the number of families in receipt of Family Credit within a BA office area at a particular date. The available information shown in the attached tables relates to the BA's Dorset District which includes the offices at Bournemouth, Poole and Weymouth.

Information is only available from 1993 as details relating to FC claims are normally destroyed after 18 months.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Family Credit Recipients for Dorset BA District

Date of Scan	*Families in receipt of Family Credit at that date*			
	Bournemouth	*Poole*	*Weymouth*	*Total*
20 August 1993	1,257	1,352	1,370	3,979
15 April 1994	1,424	1,463	1,471	4,358
10 November 1994	1,629	1,537	1,604	4,770
13 April 1995	1,853	1,592	1,767	5,212
10 November 1995	2,243	1,641	1,829	5,713
16 February 1996	2,471	1,554	1,877	5,902
7 June 1996	2,788	1,470	2,037	6,295

Data are provisional and subject to change.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans his Department has to monitor the impact that the Family Credit (General) Amendment Regulations 1996 will have on the staying-on rate for post-16 education for children whose parents are receiving family credit; and what consultations his Department held with the Department for Education and Employment before the implementation of these regulations. [39235]

Mr. Evans: We do not anticipate any impact on the staying-on rate. We estimate that the change will affect only about 15,000 families, all of whom will have already made a decision on school leaving. Family credit will remain in payment to families where the dependant has elected to remain in full-time non-advanced education.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is his estimate of *(a)* the numbers gaining from and *(b)* the costs of introducing into the calculation for family credit (i) the disabled child's premium, (ii) the disability premium and (iii) the carer premium; [39185]

(2) how many claimants of family credit have a disabled child. [39184]

Mr. Evans: Information is not currently available on which to base reliable estimates.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of replacing the child care disregard with a cash allowance of the same value payable for *(a)* each child under five years and

(b) each child under 11 years in each of (i) family credit, (ii) disability working allowance, (iii) housing benefit and (iv) control tax benefit. [39002]

Mr. Evans: The cost of including an additional cash allowance of £60 a week per child in basic entitlement for family credit, disability allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit is given in the table.

	Cost (£ billion)
Cash allowance for each child under five years	Around 1.8
Cash allowance for each child under 11 years	Around 4.7

Notes:

Estimates do not include behavioural effects.

Source:

Figures are based on the 1991–92–93 Family Expenditure Surveys, uprated to 1996–97 levels. Estimates are net of the savings from abolishing the childcare disregard.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the impact of the child care disregard on the hours worked by claimants of (i) family credit and (ii) disability working allowance. [39003]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims in total have been made for the child care disregard in respect of (i) family credit and (ii) disability working allowance; and how many have been disallowed for *(a)* being in receipt of the maximum benefit, *(b)* child care not being provided by a registered provider, *(c)* the child being aged over 11 years and *(d)* being one of a couple where the partner was not incapacitated. [39048]

Mr. Evans *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* Since October 1994, there have been 77,000 family credit claims and 156 disability working allowance claims where an award of benefit has been made and where there has also been a claim for help with child care charges. Information is not available on claims which have not led to an award of FC or DWA.

Provisional figures for the period up to 30 April 1996 for the number of families who did not receive extra help with child care charges is provided in the table.

Non-receipt of extra benefit from the child care disregard in family credit and disability working allowance

Reason for the non-receipt of extra benefit from the childcare disregard	*Family credit*	*Disability working allowance*
Receiving maximum FC/DWA	18,000	17
No registered childcare provider	12,000	5
Child aged 11 years or over	3,000	4
Only one partner working at least 16 hours a week (couple cases)	6,000	8
Partner not incapacitated (couple cases)	n/a	n/a

Sources:

1. Five per cent. sample of family credit awards.
2. One hundred per cent. of disability working allowance awards.

Note:

n/a = not available.

Tribunal Venues

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many tribunal venues run by the independent tribunal service have been closed in the last 12 months; and where they were; [38492]

(2) what plans there are to close tribunal venues currently run by the independent tribunal service in the next 12 months. [38494]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administrative arrangements for social security appeals tribunals are the responsibility of the independent tribunal service, which has been asked to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many tribunal venues there are in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland for the hearing of *(a)* social security appeal tribunals, *(b)* disability appeal tribunals, *(c)* child support appeal tribunals and *(d)* medical appeal tribunals. [38491]

Mr. Evans: The administrative arrangements for social security, disability, medical and child support appeals tribunals are the responsibility of the independent tribunal service and the independent tribunal service, Northern Ireland, which have been asked to write to the hon. Member.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the last 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39144]

Mr. Heald: The Government recognise the crucial role played by small firms in the UK economy and aim to help them by providing sound economic conditions—keeping inflation and interest rates low; reducing legislative, administrative and taxation burdens; and where appropriate provide direct assistance in the form of specialist advice and support and easing access to finance.

The reductions we have made to the lower rates of employers' national insurance contributions have helped to keep down the non-wage costs of UK businesses, including small business, and they are now among the lowest in Europe. The introduction of the employers' national insurance contribution "holiday" from April 1996 offers small businesses a further opportunity to reduce their non-wage costs. With the Inland Revenue, we have an on-going joint working programme to reduce the burdens on businesses of operating pay-as-you-earn and national insurance contributions. Successes of the programme so far include the piloting of a new employers telephone helpline and annual pack, and the provision of a joint application form to pay self-employed national insurance and tax for newly self-employed people.

We have also contributed to the Government's core deregulation initiatives by substantially reducing the number of forms sent to business and by revoking or amending regulations to reduce the burdens on business in areas such as statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay.

We have targets for the current year of reducing forms sent to businesses by 20 per cent. and surveys, which businesses and local authorities are asked to take part in, by 2 per cent.

Benefits Agency Medical Services

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has for the future of the Benefits Agency medical services currently based at Grove house, Swansea. [38997]

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Alan Williams, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to our recent Parliamentary Question asking what proposals he has for the future of the Benefits Agency Medical Services (BAMS) currently based at Grove House, Swansea.

At present there are no plans to close down the existing operations at Grove House, Swansea in advance of the contractorisation. BAMS regularly review the use of resources to ensure maximum efficiency and cost effectiveness. Any changes to the use of Grove House in the light of changing work volumes or staffing levels will be made in full consultation with staff and their representatives.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what safeguards will be put in place under the contractorisation of the Benefits Agency medical services to ensure that personal medical information obtained about benefit claimants will remain confidential to those who hold the patients' fully informed consent to receive it and will be used exclusively for purposes related to the claim for state benefit. [39188]

Mr. Burt: The Department places strong emphasis on customer confidentiality and would demand the same standards from the successful or contractors. The contractor will have a mandatory contractual requirement to confirm to the security policy of the Department which is based on Government security policy.

The successful bidder or bidders will be required to ensure that any data or information passed to them by the Department or a third party, or revealed during the course of the contract, is used only for the purpose directly relating to the Department's business and only by the appropriate staff.

Rigorous monitoring systems will be put in place to ensure on-going compliance with the requirements.

Information Services

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people used the Benefits Agency's information services in North Yorkshire in each year since 1992–93. [38933]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 23 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people used in Benefits Agency's (BA's) information services in North Yorkshire in each year since 1992–93.

The information is not available in the format requested. I have assumed that the reference to Benefits Agency Information Services is about the Mobile Information Unit (MIU) covering the BA District of North Yorkshire. This District has offices in York, Harrogate, Northallerton, Richmond, Selby, Malton and Ripon. Figures for the number of people who used the service were kept from 1994/95 only and are shown below:

1994–95: 2,304

1995–96: 2,642

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the cost budgeted for staff, employed full time or part time, to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39454]

(2) how many staff were assumed in his Department's budget, employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, *(a)* to work on press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39472]

(3) what is the cost, assumed in the budget, of people employed full time or part time to work on the press and the media in 1996–97; [39989]

(4) what was the cost of staff employed full time or part time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work on the press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94; [39431]

(5) how many staff were employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94. [39428]

Mr. Burt: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media. [39345]

Mr. Burt: The Department and its agencies do not use consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media work.

Child Benefit

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current level of expenditure on child benefit for 16 to 19 years, broken down by *(a)* age and *(b)* level of family income (i) before and (ii) after housing costs. [39234]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Expenditure in 1995–96 on child benefit for 16-year-olds was estimated to be £320 million, for 17-year-olds £225 million and for 18-year-olds £100 million, a total of £645 million. Distribution of child benefit expenditure for 16 to 18-year-olds in 1992–93, the latest date for which information is available, is in the table:

Distribution of child benefit expenditure for children aged 16 to 18 by equivalised income band, UK 1992–93

Percentages

Equivalised weekly household income (January 1993 prices)	*Before housing costs*	*After housing costs*
£100 or less	10	19
>£100 to £150	18	16
>£150 to £200	19	22
>£200 to £250	16	14
>£250 to £300	13	11
>£300 to £350	8	7
Over £350	17	12

1. Information in the table is derived from the 1992/93 Households Below Average Income dataset. 1992/93 figures are for two calendar years data combined.
2. Income bands are based on the standard Households Below Average Income definition of income—weekly household disposable income adjusted for household size and composition (equivalised).
3. Estimates are shown by £50 income bands except where figures would be unreliable due to small sample sizes. All estimates are subject to sampling error.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the gross and net savings from removing child benefit from those aged 16 to 19 years. [39233]

Mr. Mitchell: Removing child benefit for 16 to 18-year-olds would save approximately £650 million gross and approximately £520 million net assuming that child allowances continue to be payable in other benefits.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many visits (i) he and (ii) his Ministers made to *(a)* the Newbury constituency and *(b)* other constituencies in the last 12 months. [39874]

Mr. Lilley: Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Minister	*Visits to Newbury*	*Visits to other constituencies*
Secretary of State	1	15
Minister of State (Lord Mackay)	0	19
Minister of State (Mr. Burt)	0	27
Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Mr. Evans)	0	18
Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Mr. Mitchell)	0	15
Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Mr. Heald)	0	29

Figures in the table do not include visits made by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People and the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Minister for Monmouth (Mr. Evans), in their capacity as sponsor Ministers for Manchester and the north-west and for Bristol respectively.

Asthma

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many working days were lost as a result of asthma in the last year for which figures are available. [39557]

Mr. Heald: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to publish a code of practice on access to goods, facilities, services and premises under part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and guidance on the definition of disability contained in the Act. [39941]

Mr. Burt: We will be publishing tomorrow a code of practice covering rights to access to goods, facilities, services and premises under part III of the Disability Discrimination Act. The code gives practical advice through a wide range of examples to illustrate how service providers and those involved in the selling, letting and managing of premises can comply with the provisions, although the action required in any given situation will depend on the particular circumstances. By publishing the code now, we are giving service providers and others affected time to take account of its guidance before the new rights come into force on 2 December this year.

We will also be publishing guidance on the definition of disability contained in the Act, which helps to clarify who is protected by the Disability Discrimination Act's provisions.

The code and guidance will form part of a co-ordinated framework of advice and guidance to ensure that the business community and disabled people are aware of their new duties and rights under the Act.

As well as the printed version, the code and guidance will also be available in braille and on audio cassette tape. All formats will be available through Her Majesty's Stationery Office outlets.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate in each case of *(a)* numbers gaining and *(b)* the cost of introducing a taper of (i) 50 per cent. and (ii) 70 per cent. above the earnings limit to people in receipt of invalid care allowance. [39182]

Mr. Burt: The information is set out in the table:

1996–97	*50 per cent. taper*	*70 per cent. taper*
Net expenditure	£15 million	£15 million
Average gainers in year	25,000	20,000

1. Estimates are based on data from a small sample and should be treated with caution.
2. The calculations are based on deducting either 50p or 70p (depending on whether it is the 50 per cent. or 70 per cent. taper) from the average rate of Invalid Care Allowance for each pound earned about the earnings limit of £50.00.
3. Estimates are rounded to the nearest 5,000 (caseload) and £5 million (expenditure).

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the numbers gaining from and *(b)* the cost of raising the earnings limit for invalid care allowance to (i) £55.10 and (ii) £61. [39183]

Mr. Burt: The information is set out in the table:

1996–97	*Raising limit to £55.10*	*Raising limit to £61.00*
Net expenditure	£5 million	£10 million
Average gainers in year	5,000	5,000

1. Estimates are based on data from a small sample and should be treated with caution.
2. Estimates are rounded to the nearest 5,000 (caseload) and £5 million (expenditure).

Adult Dependency Claims

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what proportion of claims for adult dependency increases made during 1995–96 of claims for adult dependency increases made during 1995–96 by claimants of *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* incapacity benefit, *(c)* severe disablement allowance and *(d)* invalid care allowance were disallowed because an overlapping benefit was payable. [39004]

Mr. Roger Evans: Benefits which are subject to the overlapping benefit rules are reduced rather than disallowed. In cases where the benefit is reduced to nil, entitlement remains. This allows payment to commence, without the need for a further claim, should payment of the overlapping benefit cease for any reason. However, information on the number of adult dependency increases of unemployment benefit, incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance and invalid care allowance that are reduced or extinguished under the overlapping benefit rules is not available and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

EU Expenditure

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is social security expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product and per capita in each European Union country in the current financial year. [39050]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. The latest available data are for 1993 and are restricted to member states at that time. This information conforms to the Eurostat definition of social protection which includes more than the usual UK definition of social security—for example, spending on health and local authority social services are included.

Current expenditure on social protection as percentage of GDP

Country	*Per cent.*
Belgium	27.6
Denmark	33.2
Germany	31.0
Greece	16.3
Spain	24.0
France	30.9
Ireland	21.4
Italy	25.8
Luxembourg	24.9
Netherlands	33.6
Portugal	18.3
United Kingdom	27.8

Current expenditure on social protection per head in the purchasing power standard[1]

Country	*£*
Belgium	4,903.7
Denmark	5,598.4
Germany	5,365.7
Greece	1,598.5
Spain	2,935.7
France	5,317.6
Ireland	2,680.9
Italy	4,291.4
Luxembourg	6,630.1
Netherlands	5,576.3
Portugal	1,948.3
United Kingdom	4,323.4

[1] The purchasing power standard specific to private consumption is used to equivalise the per capita expenditure between the EU countries in terms of national price levels.
1. The information is reproduced from the Eurostat publication "Social protection expenditure and receipts 1980–1993".
2. The data are provisional for all countries except Denmark.
3. UK data are for the British financial year, all other data are for the calendar year.

Supported Housing Costs

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the terms of reference of his interdepartmental review of funding of supported housing costs; when he intends this review to be concluded; and if the review will involve consultations with other Departments. [38154]

Mr. Roger Evans: The timing and exact terms of the review, which will involve consultation with all interested Government Departments, will be completed shortly.

I shall write to the hon. Member when they are agreed.

Departmental Vehicles (Traffic Violations)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of traffic violations involving departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39301]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available. Fines and other penalties are the responsibility of each driver.

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in his name, or that of other Ministers in his Department, for meetings with Conservative Members immediately preceding questions to his Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39521]

Mr. Lilley: None.

Public Record Office Files

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reasons the file with the classmark PIN 59/19 recorded at the Public Record Office is currently closed for 75 years by his Department; and if he will consider opening *(a)* all or *(b)* part of it. [37611]

Mr. Heald *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* Under the Public Records Act, all records are required to be closed for the minimum period consistent with protection of the sensitive information identified in them. The normal closure period is 30 years, but the Lord Chancellor may prescribe an extension to this where any of a number of criteria are satisfied, including, for example, where it is necessary to protect an individual from disclosure of sensitive information during his or her lifetime.

The fact that a record has been closed for a stated period does not, however, preclude its release before that period has elapsed, if its sensitivity has passed, an application may be made for a reduction of the stated period.

We are already actively reviewing classes of information held in the Public Record Office with a view to accelerated opening, and will examine the file to which the question refers at the earliest opportunity.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been paid out (i) in unemployment benefit and (ii) on other benefits to unemployed people in *(a)* York and *(b)* North Yorkshire in each year since 1979–80. [38934]

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Estimated annual expenditure (£ millions) on unemployed claimants (Yorkshire and Humberside)

Year	*Unemployment benefit*	*Income support*
1983–84	134.4	—
1984–85	—	—
1985–86	156.8	—
1986–87	169.7	—
1987–88	137.5	—
1988–89	113.9	—
1989–90	70.8	—
1990–91	71.8	—
1991–92	139.4	700.9
1992–93	141.1	850.0
1993–94	142.9	987.6
1994–95	124.5	1,045.6
1995–96	104.8	1,058.3

Source:

Income Support Statistics Annual and Quarterly Enquiries 5 per cent. sample of unemployed claimants.

Notes:

1. Estimated expenditure is based on weekly caseload and average benefit payment.
2. For unemployment benefit, this is based on sample taken on the second Thursday of May and November for years prior to 1993–94. Thereafter it is based on samples taken on the second Thursday in February, May, August and November. For income support the sample was taken in May each year.
3. Data for 1984–85 for unemployment benefit are not available at this level and for Income Support prior to 1991.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Learmont Report

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of the Learmont report. [40082]

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Prison Service submission on the Learmont report was first submitted to his Department for consideration. [35862]

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. and learned Friend asked the Prison Service to examine the operational impact and effectiveness of the Learmont recommendations. The Prison Service has made a number of submissions on various aspects of the Learmont report since it was published on 16 October 1995. Some Learmont recommendations called for fundamental reviews of policy. My right hon. and learned Friend has yet to receive the findings of all these major reviews.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if there will be a period of consultation following the Government's statement on the implementation of the Learmont report. [35867]

Miss Widdecombe: Our response to the Learmont report and any associated arrangements are still under consideration.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is his latest estimate of the date of publication for his response to the Learmont report; and if he will make a statement; [36486]

(2) what measures are being taken to assess the cost of full implementation of the Learmont report; and if he will make a statement. [36679]

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has, over what time scale and at what cost, to devolve greater responsibility to area managers in the Prison Service in respect of (i) corporate planning, (ii) service delivery, (iii) resource management and (iv) budgets and to develop links from area managers to board level through operational directors; [37773]

(2) what plans he has, and at what cost, to ensure that annual training for all staff in the Prison Service is increased to 14 days over the next five years; [37772]

(3) what plans he has, over what time scale and at what cost, to establish core competencies, for training purposes for all grades in the Prison Service; [37770]

(4) what plans he has, over what time scale and at what cost, to ensure that work managers operate from an office on their wing; [37778]

(5) what plans he has, over what time scale and at what cost, to ensure that those remand category A prisoners who cannot be held in dispersal prisons are held in other prisons with accommodation to category A standard; [37766]

(6) what plans he has to introduce overlocking and permanent movement systems to the dispersal prison estate; [37774]

(7) what plans he has to increase the amount of *(a)* training and *(b)* enhanced training staff in dispersal prisons undergo; [37731]

(8) what plans he has, over what time scale and at what cost, to ensure that prisoner programmes are adopted nationally, and that each sentenced prisoner serving more than 12 months has a sentence plan and is allocated a personal officer; [37768]

(9) what progress has been made in respect of the security of prisoners' property on transfer; [37776]

(10) what progress has been made with the Prison Service headquarters security survey on electronic security defences; what (i) technical problems and (ii) remedial work have been identified; and what plans he has over what time scale and at what cost to address these matters; [37764]

(11) what plans he has, over what time scale and at what cost, to provide leadership and management training to line managers in the Prison Service; [37771]

(12) what plans he has, over what time scale and at what cost, to ensure that the Prison Service is able to provide suitable accommodation for high-risk women prisoners and young offenders; [37767]

(13) what plans he has, over what time scale and at what cost, in respect of the role of wing managers in prisons; [37775]

(14) what plans he has, over what time scale and at what cost, (i) to improve security standards in the prison estate and (ii) to provide closed circuit television and other appropriate facilities at the entrance of dispersal prisons; [37763]

(15) what plans he has, over what time scale and at what cost, to ensure that an accreditation, system on the basis of performance measurement against national standards is introduced into the Prison Service; [37769]

(16) what plans he has, over what time scale and at what cost, to improve selection procedures for staff for dispersal prisons; [37777]

(17) what plans he has, over what time scale and at what cost, to provide a supporting secretariat to (i) the head of operations and security and (ii) the governing governor in the Prison Service; [37761]

(18) what plans he has, over what time scale and at what cost, to ensure that the option of imposing closed visits is available in all secure establishments; [37765]

(19) when he expects to make a statement on the implementation of the Learmont report; [35868]

(20) pursuant to his answer of 10 July, *Official Report*, column *170*, what estimates have been received for the minimum security standards which are under consideration; if he will set out each of the phases of the programme to develop minimum security standards; and when the work to reach a decision on the appropriate minimum security standards will be complete. [37760]

Miss Widdecombe: Details of steps taken by the Prison Service to improve its performance are contained in the interim progress report on the "Review of Prison Service Security in England and Wales and the escape from Parkhurst Prison on Tuesday 3 January 1995—The Learmont Inquiry" given in a table, copies of which have been placed in the Library. The progress report excludes those recommendations identical or very similar to those of the Woodcock report which my right hon. and learned Friend accepted on 19 December 1994. The table gives details of the recommendations already implemented. Six reviews are still in progress in respect of recommendations: 1, 88, 97, 98, 101, 107. The remaining recommendations are still under consideration.

I shall report to the House on outstanding issues in due course.

The Prison Service has initiated a wide-ranging programme of action to build on the improvement in its performance in security, including measures taken in response to the recommendations of the Woodcock and Learmont reports.

The Prison Service has pressed ahead with upgrading the high security dispersal estate to standards recommended in the Woodcock report—a programme which Sir John Learmont included in his recommendations. In his review of Prison Service progress towards implementing the Woodcock report, Sir John Learmont reported in December 1995 that

"in a period of less than a year, the Prison Service has made infinitely more headway in implementing the Woodcock recommendations than it seems reasonable to expect".

The Prison Service has achieved a sharp reduction in the number of escapes. Escapes in 1995–96 were 59 per cent. down on those in 1994–95 and 79 per cent. down compared to 1992–93.

The security manual has been redrafted emphasising the distinction between what is mandatory and what is discretionary.

The Prison Service has made excellent progress to ensure that security measures are consistently observed.

The Prison Service has strengthened independent security audit which it had in hand before the Whitemoor escape in recognition of the major contribution it has to make to improving security standards.

The Prison Service has pressed ahead with a number of organisational changes designed to ensure that operational management of prisons can be carried out more effectively.

In addition to those reviews still in progress and referred to above, the Prison Service has completed 10 reviews, the conclusions of which are under consideration.

Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a list showing the number, nature and value of contracts awarded, by his Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Andersen, Grant Thonrton, BDO Stoy Hayward, Pannell Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes, and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996. [37325]

Mr. Howard: For the period specified, information on the number and nature of contracts let to each listed company and the total sum paid to each company by my Department is given in the table. Individual contract values are not given on the grounds of commercial confidentiality.

Consultant	*Nature*	*Total value*
1 April to date		
Coopers and Lybrand and Subsidiaries and Associates	Strategy development	
	Underpinning and modelling accountancy work	[1]£15,143
KPMG and Subsidiaries and Associates	Audit of procurement procedures	
	Consultancy database	
	Consultancy support quantum	
	Job evaluation consultancy	£443,625
Price Waterhouse and Subsidiaries and Associates	Seminar	[1]—
Ernst and Young and Subsidiaries and Associates	—	—
Deloitte and Touche and Subsidiaries and Associates	—	—
Arthur Andersen and Subsidiaries and Associates	—	—
Grant Thornton and Subsidiaries and Associates	—	—
BDO Stoy Hayward and Subsidiaries and Associates	—	—
Pannell Kerr Forster and Subsidiaries and Associates	—	—
Robson Rhodes and Subsidiaries and Associates	—	—
1995-1996		
Coopers and Lybrand and Subsidiaries and Associates	Private Finance Initiative Consultancy Support	
	Advice and project support	
	Assessment pay services business strategy	
	Strategy development	
	Project management	
	Customer survey	
	Consultancy	
	Underpinning and modelling accountancy work	[1]525,630
KPMG and Subsidiaries and Associates	Review of Emergency Planning College	
	Identification of competencies of probation officers	
	Accountancy support	[1]69,818
Price Waterhouse and Subsidiaries and Associates	Consultancy	
	Pilot study in number of area probation services	[1]222,364
Ernst and Young and Subsidiaries and Associates	Review of management structure for National Strategy for Police Information Systems Project (NSPIS)	
	Consultancy	[1]47,500
Deloite and Touche and Subsidiaries and Associates	Review of United Kingdom Passport Agency offices	
	Consultancy	
	Research	[1]125,165
Arthur Andersen and Subsidiaries and Associates	—	—
Grant Thornton and Subsidiaries and Associates	—	—
BDO Stoy Hayward and Subsidiaries and Associates	—	—
Pannell Kerr Forster and Subsidiaries and Associates	—	—
Robson Rhodes and Subsidiaries and Associates	—	—

[1] Individual contract values are not given on the grounds of commercial confidentiality.

Dispersal Prisons

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many hours of enhanced training staff in each dispersal prison have undergone in each year since 1990; and how many hours are planned in the next four financial years; [37732]

(2) how many hours of training staff in each dispersal prison have undergone in each year since 1990; and how many hours are planned in the next four financial years. [37730]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Scott to Mr. George Howarth, dated 24 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about the number of hours training undertaken by staff in dispersals.

Training figures for the years in question are not held centrally. I will write to you as soon as they are available.

Deportation

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many persons were recommended for deportation with no custodial sentence during *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996 to the latest convenient date; and in how many such cases the courts directed release (i) subject to conditions and (ii) without conditions; [38081]

(2) how many decisions to make a deportation order, by nationality of the potential deportee, where there is a right of appeal as provided under *(a)* section 5 of the Immigration Act 1988 or *(b)* section 8(3) of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 have been made in each quarter since 1 July 1994; and on what basis these decisions have been made; [38059]

(3) how many people were received into (i) prison department establishments, (ii) immigration detention centres or (iii) police cells under Immigration Act powers during *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996 to the latest convenient date; how many of these were (1) asylum seekers and (2) applying to remain on non-asylum grounds, by individual prison establishment or detention centre; what was the average daily population of persons so detained in each of those years; what was the average length of time spent in detention by persons so detained in each of those years; and if he will give a breakdown by nationality of persons so detained for each of those years; [38082]

(4) how many persons were detained under Immigration Act powers for a period of more than two months on completion of a custodial sentence during 1995 and 1996 to the latest convenient date. [38080]

Mr. Kirkhope: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* decisions to deport have been made, *(b)* deportation orders have been signed and *(c)* deportation orders have been enforced against (i) British overseas citizens and (ii) other British nationals who are not British citizens, in each year since 1994; to which countries it has been proposed to send these people; and how many such people whom decisions to deport were made left the country voluntarily. [38076]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information available is given in the table. Statistics are not available on the countries to which British nationals have been removed from the United Kingdom under the deportation process. The British nationals removed in 1994–96 were British dependent territories citizens or British nationals (overseas) from Hong Kong, except for one British dependent territories citizen from St. Helena in 1994 and 1 BDTC—territory not recorded—in 1995.

British nationals subject to deportation action

	1994	1995	1996 January to March[1]
British overseas citizens			
Notices of intention to deport issued and court recommendations for deportation made	4	3	2
Deportation orders made	1	1	—
Deportation orders enforced	—	1	1
Supervised departures	—	—	1
Voluntary departures	1	—	1
Other British nationals[2]			
Notices of intention to deport issued and court recommendations for deportation made	77	61	13
Deportation orders made	22	23	3
Deportation orders enforced	11	8	1
Supervised departures	16	19	4
Voluntary departures	9	5	1

[1] Provisional figures.
[2] British Dependent Territories Citizens, British Nationals (Overseas), British Subjects and British Protected Persons.

Immigration

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many nationals of *(a)* Jamaica, *(b)* Turkey, *(c)* Morocco, *(d)* the USA, *(e)* Australia, *(f)* Malaysia, *(g)* Hong Kong, *(h)* Guyana, (i) Trinidad, *(j)* Colombia and *(K)* Algeria were *(i)* granted and (ii) refused permission to enter the United Kingdom at ports of entry in each quarter since January 1995 and in total, to the nearest available data. [38065]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is given in the table.

Passenger admissions[1] and persons refused leave to enter and removed, for selected nationalities in 1995 and first quarter 1996

Nationality	1st quarter 1995		2nd quarter 1995		3rd quarter 1995		4th quarter 1995		Year 1995		1st quarter 1996	
	Admissions	Refused and removed	Admissions	Refused and removed	Admissions	Refused and removed	Admissions	Refused and removed	Admissions	Refused and removed	Admissions	Refused and removed
Jamaica	4,500	80	6,640	104	8,940	101	5,450	278	25,500	563	5,000	188
Turkey	19,600	27	21,700	42	31,300	67	24,800	107	97,400	243	24,000	65
Morocco	4,090	14	4,540	24	6,750	38	3,900	64	19,300	140	3,640	37
USA	587,000	236	940,000	230	1,030,000	227	674,000	316	3,230,000	1,009	641,000	256
Australia	87,000	81	158,000	113	179,000	104	119,000	147	543,000	445	95,000	93
Malaysia	21,900	78	37,000	105	51,200	128	38,418	86	149,000	397	29,300	155
Hong Kong[2]	20,200	12	23,000	12	43,700	7	16,400	16	103,000	47	19,200	4
Guyana	1,010	11	1,400	18	1,830	8	1,170	26	5,420	63	1,040	47
Trinidad and Tobago	2,780	16	4,150	16	5,830	15	3,200	32	16,000	79	2,990	31
Colombia	5,090	63	8,640	110	10,300	69	6,850	244	30,900	486	5,830	120
Algeria	3,460	55	4,070	73	6,170	60	3,940	113	17,600	301	3,920	71

[1] Rounded figures, numbers of journeys.
[2] Including Hong Kong stateless persons.

Drugs

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women convicted by the courts of drug offences in England and Wales during 1995. [39225]

Mr. Maclean: Data for 1995 will not be available until the autumn. In 1994, there were 25,264 convictions in England and Wales for males and 2,532 for females, where the principal offence was for a drug offence.

Tobacco Smuggling

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many calls have been received relating to tobacco smuggling on the freephone crime stoppers number; and how many prosecutions have been effected as a result of that hotline. [38778]

Mr. Maclean: There were two calls received in 1993, 21 in 1994 and 26 in 1995. Up to 16 July this year, 48 calls have been received, Information on prosecutions is not available centrally.

Buckley Hall Prison

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 July, *Official Report*, column *446*, about prisoners at Buckley Hall prison serving sentences for rape, murder, armed robbery, manslaughter and arson, which of the fires that have occurred at the prison since 14 December 1994 have been caused by prisoners with a sentence for arson. [39231]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Scott to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 24 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about fires that have occurred at Buckley Hall prison since 14 December 1994 and which may have been caused by prisoners with a sentence for arson.

There have been no fires at Buckley Hall which have been caused by any prisoner serving a sentence for arson.

Illegal Entrants

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the *(a)* passengers in total and *(b)* persons treated as illegal entrants who were granted temporary admission or release in 1995 and 1996 to the latest convenient date subsequently absconded; how many of these were (1) asylum seekers and (2) applying for leave on some other basis; and how many (i) later reported voluntarily to the immigration authorities and (ii) were redetained. [38079]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information relates to the numbers of person who absconded, either from detention or by failing to respond to the terms of temporary admission or release, and is given in the table. The other information requested is not available.

Absconders

Category of person	*1995*	*1996 First quarter*
Passengers[1]	2,049	605
Illegal entrants:		
Asylum seekers	186	45
Others	101	18
Total	287	63

[1] A breakdown between asylum seekers and other passengers is not available.

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of staff employed full time or part time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work on the press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94. [39410]

Mr. Howard: The cost of staff employed full time or part time by my Department to provide (i) information and publicity; and (ii) press office services, all media, in each of the years listed was as follows:

1995–96
(i) £558,238
(ii) £675,761

1994–95
(i) £511,307
(ii) £661,692

1993–94
(i) £524,251
(ii) £699,002

These figures include information and administrative staff. They do not include press and publicity staff employed by the prisons agency.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media. [39348]

Mr. Howard: My Department's communication directorate budget for 1996–97 includes no provision for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media. The directorate buys the great majority of its production services from a range of suppliers, but does not use consultants. Communication directorate specialists from the Government information service provides Ministers and officials with advice with advice on all aspects of information, publicity and press and media.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94. [39420]

Mr. Howard: Staff numbers employed by my Department, full time or part time, to provide *(a)* information and publicity and *(b)* press office services, all media, in each of the years listed were as follows:

1995–96
(a) 19
(b) 23

1994–95
(a) 17
(b) 22

1993–94
(a) 18
(b) 24

These figures include information and administrative grades. They do not include staff employed by the prisons agency.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost budgeted for staff, employed full time or part time, to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39445]

Mr. Howard: The cost budgeted for staff employed full time or part time by my Department to provide information and publicity in 1996–97 is £1,303,340. The total includes press office staff, £717,340, and publicity and campaigns staff, £586,000. It covers information and administrative grades but does not include prisons agency staff.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff are assumed in his Department's budget, employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, *(a)* to work on the press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39368]

Mr. Howard: My Department's communication directorate budget for 1996–97 provides for employment of 24 press office, all media, staff and 19 information and publicity staff. These figures include information and administrative grades. There are two part-time

information staff and two part-time administrative staff. The total does not include prisons agency staff.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost, assumed in the budget, of people employed full time or part time to work on the press and the media in 1996–97. [39985]

Mr. Howard: I will write to the hon. Member.

Vehicle Crime

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the average value of items stolen from cars in each of the last five years in South Yorkshire; [39238]

(2) what was the average value of items stolen in recorded domestic break-ins in each of the last five years in South Yorkshire. [39239]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is contained in the table.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police in South Yorkshire—average value of property stolen[1]

Average value (£)

Year	*Theft from a vehicle*	*Burglary in a dwelling*
1991	232	908
1992	254	1,429
1993	244	1,020
1994	242	1,138
1995	254	1,023

[1] Excluding offences where the value was recorded as nil.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many recorded car break-ins there were in South Yorkshire in each year since 1979; [39242]

(2) how many recorded domestic burglaries there were in South Yorkshire in each year since 1979. [39241]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested in contained in the table.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police in South Yorkshire

Number of offences

Year	*Theft from a vehicle*	*Burglary in a dwelling*
1979	5,478	4,439
1980	6,328	5,777
1981	8,305	6,557
1982	9,548	7,744
1983	9,933	9,015
1984	11,611	10,476
1985	10,407	9,057
1986	12,230	11,125
1987	13,821	11,712
1988	14,033	10,213
1989	16,055	10,132
1990	19,315	12,126
1991	21,848	15,085
1992	22,572	18,372
1993	25,016	25,230
1994	23,304	25,563
1995	24,217	22,235

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the clear-up rates of recorded *(a)* car break-ins and *(b)* burglaries in South Yorkshire in each year since 1979. [39243]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is contained in the table.

Clear-up rates in South Yorkshire

Percentages

Year	*Theft from a vehicle*	*Burglary*
1979	30	40
1980	24	36
1981	33	44
1982	37	39
1983	40	40
1984	29	31
1985	37	41
1986	30	36
1987	31	35
1988	35	44
1989	33	36
1990	37	36
1991	29	27
1992	16	17
1993	8	13
1994	13	20
1995	12	22

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average age of people convicted of *(a)* car theft and *(b)* burglary in South Yorkshire in each of the last five years. [39240]

Mr. Maclean: Information for 1990 to 1994 on the number of offenders convicted at all courts in the South Yorkshire police force area by age is given in the tables. Data for 1995 will not be available until the autumn.

Table A: Number of persons convicted at all courts of (a) car theft and (b) burglary offences in the South Yorkshire Police Force Area by age, 1990

Age	*Car theft*[1]	*Burglary Domestic burglary*	*Burglary Non domestic burglary*	*Total burglary*
10	1	2	—	2
11	2	6	5	11
12	4	8	4	12
13	10	14	21	35
14	17	22	25	47
15	68	35	47	82
16	85	50	44	94
17	197	91	75	166
18	172	53	105	158
19	139	70	88	158
20	90	34	66	100
21 and under 25	196	120	188	308
25 and under 30	[2]64	48	101	149
30 and under 40	24	32	45	77
40 and under 50	7	9	20	29
50 and under 60	2	3	6	9
60 and over	—	—	—	—
All ages	1,078	597	840	1,437

[1] Car theft includes the *indictable offences* of theft from vehicles; theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle car and the *summary offences* of stealing and unauthorised taking of a conveyance.

[2] Includes persons, convicted of summary offences, given the default age of 25 where the exact age was not known.

Table B: Number of persons convicted at all courts of (a) car theft and (b) burglary offences in the South Yorkshire Police Force Area by age, 1991

Age	Car theft[1]	Burglary: Domestic burglary	Burglary: Non domestic burglary	Total burglary
10	—	—	—	—
11	1	1	2	3
12	10	8	9	17
13	14	18	7	25
14	36	25	16	41
15	100	43	45	88
16	102	43	56	99
17	123	58	61	119
18	156	79	89	168
19	114	71	77	148
20	108	55	77	132
21 and under 25	206	108	202	310
25 and under 30	[2]72	68	117	185
30 and under 40	47	44	72	116
40 and under 50	9	9	20	29
50 and under 60	3	2	5	7
60 and over	—	—	1	1
All ages	1,101	632	856	1,488

[1] Car theft includes the *indictable offences* of theft from vehicles; theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle car and the *summary offences* of stealing and unauthorised taking of a conveyance.

[2] Includes persons, convicted of summary offences, given the default age of 25 where the exact age was not known.

Table C: Number of persons convicted at all courts of (a) car theft and (b) burglary offences in the South Yorkshire Police Force Area by age, 1992

Age	Car theft[1]	Burglary: Domestic burglary	Burglary: Non domestic burglary	Total burglary
10	—	—	—	—
11	—	2	1	3
12	1	2	3	5
13	10	15	9	24
14	13	17	17	34
15	49	25	35	60
16	66	47	51	98
17	103	80	69	149
18	98	70	64	134
19	113	56	65	121
20	96	42	70	112
21 and under 25	173	130	159	289
25 and under 30	[2]83	55	102	157
30 and under 40	37	31	89	120
40 and under 50	5	9	22	31
50 and under 60	1	1	2	3
60 and over	1	—	1	1
All ages	849	582	759	1,341

[1] Car theft includes the *indictable offences* of aggravated vehicle taking—injury to person, damage to property of care (as from 1 April 1992); theft from vehicles; theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle car and the *summary offences* of stealing and unauthorised taking of a conveyance and aggravated vehicle taking where criminal damage of £2,000 or under (as from 1 April 1992).

[2] Includes persons, convicted of summary offences, given the default age of 25 where the exact age was not known.

Table D: Number of persons convicted at all courts of (a) car theft and (b) burglary offences in the South Yorkshire Police Force Area by age, 1993

Age	Car theft[1]	Burglary: Domestic burglary	Burglary: Non domestic burglary	Total burglary
10	—	1	—	1
11	1	—	—	—
12	1	2	2	4
13	10	10	8	18
14	33	23	14	37
15	29	22	27	49
16	54	37	27	64
17	72	62	45	107
18	95	41	69	110
19	79	41	46	87
20	70	46	51	97
21 and under 25	130	103	132	235
25 and under 30	[2]47	52	95	147
30 and under 40	27	31	61	92
40 and under 50	6	4	10	14
50 and under 60	1	2	—	2
60 and over	—	—	1	1
All ages	655	477	588	1,065

[1] Car theft includes the *indictable offences* of aggravated vehicle taking—injury to person, damage to property of car; theft from vehicles; theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle car and the *summary offences* of stealing and unauthorised taking of a conveyance and aggravated vehicle taking where criminal damage of £2,000 or under.

[2] Includes persons, convicted of summary offences, given the default age of 25 where the exact age was not known.

Table E: Number of persons convicted at all courts of (a) car theft and (b) burglary offences in the South Yorkshire Police Force Area by age, 1994

Age	Car theft[1]	Burglary: Domestic burglary	Burglary: Non domestic burglary	Total burglary
10	1	—	—	—
11	1	—	3	3
12	4	1	3	4
13	8	10	4	14
14	22	29	14	43
15	47	45	22	67
16	60	48	36	84
17	81	52	36	88
18	92	72	41	113
19	54	43	41	84
20	57	42	27	69
21 and under 25	124	136	137	273
25 and under 30	[2]54	67	81	148
30 and under 40	26	39	65	104
40 and under 50	6	9	15	24
50 and under 60	—	—	3	3
60 and over	2	—	1	1
All ages	639	593	529	1,122

[1] Car theft includes the *indictable offences* of aggravated vehicle taking—injury to person, damage to property of car theft from vehicles; theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle car and the *summary offences* of stealing and unauthorised taking of a conveyance and aggravated vehicle taking where criminal damage of £2,000 or under.

[2] Includes persons, convicted of summary offences, given the default age of 25 where the exact age was not known.

Road Traffic Regulations

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to include the enforcement of road traffic regulations in the list of key policing objectives of 1996–97 and 1997–98. [38131]

Mr. Maclean: The key objectives for 1996–97 were announced on 15 December 1995. They do not include an objective on the enforcement of road traffic regulations. Consultation on the objectives for 1997–98 has not yet been completed.

Police Driver Training Scheme

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the requirements of the police driver training scheme. [38133]

Mr. Maclean: It is for individual chief constables to determine the extent to which their officers are trained to drive particular vehicles. The recommended criteria for police driver training are set out in the 1989 Association of Chief Officers of Police police driving report and the 1995 pursuits and pursuit training report.

Involuntary Manslaughter

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to implement the recommendations contained in the Law Commission's report into involuntary manslaughter. [38130]

Mr. Maclean: The Law Commission's report on involuntary manslaughter raises some important but complex issues, which the Government are still considering.

Speed Cameras (Fines)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to reinvest the revenue raised from fines resulting from enforcement work carried out by speed cameras in traffic police enforcement. [38132]

Mr. Maclean: Fine income from the enforcement of speeding offences by cameras, like all fine income, goes to the consolidated fund at the Treasury. It is not the Government's general policy to earmark that income to a particular area of expenditure. We believe that the best way to decide among the competing claims on taxpayers' money is to consider each on its merits and set priorities among them.

Police Officers (Wales)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of police officers employed by each Welsh police authority in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [39194]

Mr. Maclean: Information on police strength in individual force areas from 1979 to 1995 can be found in the appendix to the annual reports of Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary, copies of which are in the Library. Details of police strength for each Welsh force at 31 March are set out in the table:

Police force	*Strength at 31 March 1996*
Dyfed-Powys	991
Gwent	1,044
North Wales	1,328
South Wales	3,027

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many new police officers each Welsh local police authority requested in the yearly settlement in each year since 1992; how many police officers they were awarded; and if he will make a statement. [39094]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is given in the table:

	1992–93		*1993–94*		*1994–95*	
Force	*Numbers requested*	*Numbers granted*	*Numbers requested*	*Numbers[1] granted*	*Numbers requested*	*Numbers[1] granted*
Dyfed Powys	50	25	75	Nil	75	Nil
Gwent	10	1	37	Nil	65	Nil
North Wales	30	17	58	Nil	58	Nil
South Wales	44	Nil	44	Nil	61	Nil

[1] In view of the constraints on public expenditure, no increases in establishments were approved for any force in England and Wales in 1993–94 or 1994–95.

No applications were submitted for 1995–96. The centralised system of determining police numbers by setting an establishment of officers for each police force was abolished from 1 April 1995.

Crime Statistics (Wales)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the numbers of reported *(a)* violent crimes, *(b)* burglaries and *(c)* assaults in each Welsh police authority in (i) 1979, (ii) 1985, (iii) 1990, and at the latest available date; and if he will make a statement. [39095]

Mr. Maclean: The available information relates to recorded offences and is given in the table.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police in Wales

Number of offences

	Violent crime	*Burglary*	*Wounding*
Dyfed Powys			
1979	773	1,714	499
1985	967	2,743	742
1990	2,176	3,419	1,763
1995	2,234	3,515	1,835
Gwent			
1979	1,330	3,319	1,028

Notifiable offences recorded by the police in Wales

Number of offences

	Violent crime	*Burglary*	*Wounding*
1985	1,7[illegible]	4,887	1,493
1990	2,643	5,235	2,165
1995	[illegible]991	6,517	2,423
North Wales			
1979	[illegible]	4,656	1,117
1985	1,508	9,084	1,557
1990	2,731	8,342	2,311
1995	2,699	9,352	2,167
South Wales			
1979	3,064	17,900	2,391
1985	3,146	25,530	2,698
1990	5,371	28,121	4,456
1995	7,584	36,941	6,094

Parliamentary Questions (Meetings)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in his name, or that of other Ministers in his Department, for meetings with Conservative hon. Members immediately preceding questions to his Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39516]

Mr. Howard: None.

Departmental Vehicles (Traffic Violations)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of traffic violations involving departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39313]

Mr. Howard: Figures for before February 1988 are not available, but the information requested since that date is as follows:

February 1988–July 1992
77 fixed penalty notices
7 excess charge notices
4 notice of intended prosecutions
1 overloading
Total fines £2,140

July 1992–July 1993
34 fixed penalty notices
9 excess charge notices
8 notice of intended prosecutions
Total fines £1,516

August 1993–mid-August 1994
22 fixed penalty notices
24 excess charge notices
23 notice of intended prosecutions
1 penalty charge notice
1 standard charge notice
Total fines £1,807

Mid-August 1994–April 1995
13 fixed penalty notices
3 excess charge notices
29 notice of intended prosecutions
18 penalty charge notices
5 standard charge notices
Total fines £1,875

May 1995–December 1995
24 fixed penalty notices
17 notice of intended prosecutions
6 penalty charge notices
Total fines £1,770

January 1996–Present
3 fixed penalty notices
2 excess charge notices
12 notice of intended prosecutions
15 penalty charge notices
1 standard charge notice
Total fines £836

Details of the fines incurred by drivers who are prosecuted are not available.

Immigration Carriers Liability Act 1987

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the amount of revenue raised from fines imposed under the Immigration Carriers Liability Act 1987 in each year since its introduction. [39292]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is as follows:

	£ million
1987	1.403
1988	2.274
1989	1.721
1990	3.433
1991	7.581
1992	4.789
1993	11.500
1994	8.652
1995	11.212
1996 (to 30 June)	4.335

Drunk Driving

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)*convictions there have been for drunk driving in each year since 1979. [39320]

Mr. Maclean: The available information, which relates to the number of prosecutions and convictions for the offence of "driving etc. after consuming alcohol or taking drugs", is contained in the table:

Prosecutions and convictions at all courts for the offence of driving etc. after consuming alcohol or taking drugs, England and Wales

Year	*Number of prosecutions*	*Number of convictions*
1979	74,550	66,701
1980	87,967	78,093
1981	82,051	71,352
1982	85,558	75,005

Prosecutions and convictions at all courts for the offence of driving etc. after consuming alcohol or taking drugs, England and Wales

Year	Number of prosecutions	Number of convictions
1983	111,450	98,016
1984	116,244	101,469
1985	121,239	106,766
1986	121,233	107,059
1987	130,533	115,097
1988	135,825	119,033
1989	129,122	114,347
1990	127,638	113,166
1991	118,584	103,821
1992	110,208	95,207
1993	105,158	91,198
1994	104,690	89,700

Figures for 1995 are not yet available.

Opportunist Crimes (Traffic Lights)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice his Department has issued to (i) police forces and (ii) the public on countering opportunist crimes at traffic lights. [39561]

Mr. Maclean: Advice on preventing this kind of crime is contained in a number of Home Office publications.

The Home Office crime prevention agency handbook, "Your Practical Guide to Crime Prevention", contains advice on personal safety, which includes advice on safety while driving, much of which is relevant to this kind of opportunistic crime. More specific guidance is also included in "Steer Clear of Car Crime", which the Home Office produced in 1995. Copies of these publications are distributed to forces in England and Wales, and are passed on through crime prevention officers to the general public.

As with all crime prevention advice produced by the Home Office, great care is taken to ensure that it is not fear inducing.

Advice on safety while driving is also included in the crime prevention manual produced by the Home Office crime prevention college. Crime prevention officers retain the manual on completion of their training.

Young Runaways

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the Centrepoint-National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children report, "Nowhere to Hide: Giving Young Runaways a Voice", a copy of which has been sent to him; and what progress has been made since the inter-departmental and inter-agency meetings in 1992. [39650]

Mr. Maclean: We have not received a copy of the report but will be glad to look at it should a copy be sent to us.

The Home Office has funded the Police National Missing Persons Bureau, which was set up in 1994 as a national resource for information on vulnerable persons, including juveniles, who have been reported as missing for over 28 days, and those who have been missing for less than 28 days but whose disappearance gives ground for concern.

Metropolitan Police

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of the civilianisation of posts within the Metropolitan police service. [39572]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner that, during the last 10 financial years, 2,592 non-operational police posts have been civilianised within the Metropolitan police.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the future role of the Metropolitan police service in undertaking the coroner's assistant duty; [39570]

(2) what estimate he has made of the annual (i) cost to the Metropolitan police service for undertaking the coroner's assistant role and (ii) the number of hours that the Metropolitan police spend on coroner's assistant duties. [39574]

Mr. Maclean: There are no plans for the Metropolitan police to withdraw from undertaking the coroner's assistant duty. A programme of civilianisation of the role of coroner's officer, releasing police officers for other operational duties, will be completed in September this year. I understand from the Commissioner that the annual cost of the coroner's assistant role is £1.6 million, representing 180,000 hours.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police vehicles were on operational duty with the Metropolitan police service in each of the last five years; and how many are currently on operational duty. [39571]

Mr. Maclean: The information in the table has been supplied by the Commissioner of Police of the Metroplitan. The figures exclude boats, trailers, instructional vehicles, industrial and agricultural equipment, air support units and other miscellaneous vehicles.

Year (as at 31 March)	Operational fleet
1991	3,934
1992	4,028
1993	4,037
1994	3,948
1995	4,029
1996	4,192
Current	4,289

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent by the Metropolitan police in each of their divisions in the financial year 1995–96; how much is budgeted to be spent in each division in 1996–97; and how many full-time police officers are currently employed in each division. [39692]

Mr. Maclean: I will write to the hon. Member.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recruits from training school are being taken on by police stations in the Metropolitan police service in the current year; and how many were in each of the last five years. [39573]

Mr. Maclean: The information has been obtained from the Metropolitan police Commissioner and is given in the table.

Calendar year	*Number of recruits*
1991	1,128
1992	877
1993	1,358
1994	1,248
1995	1,012
1996 (to date)	442

Mr. Brian Parsons

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he estimates that solicitors acting for Mr. Brian Parsons will be granted full disclosure of material arising from recent investigations by the Devon and Cornwall police, in accordance with the Hickey ruling. [39608]

Mr. Kirkhope: Officials are arranging for the appropriate material to be disclosed to Mr. Parsons' solicitors within the terms of the divisional court judgment in ex-parte Hickey et al. We would expect to make this disclosure in the next fortnight.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he indicated to the solicitor for Mr. Brian Parsons that the scenes of crime video relating to his case would be disclosed; and when he expects it will be disclosed. [39607]

Mr. Kirkhope: Disclosure of the scenes of crime video is entirely a matter for the Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall police. I understand, however, that a copy is to be made available to Mr. Parsons' solicitor this week.

Fine Defaulters

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) of those fine defaulters who have received a custodial sentence in the last year for which figures are available, what is the average sentence *(a)* imposed and *(b)* served; [39703]

(2) what percentage of the average prison population in the last year for which figures are available has consisted of fine defaulters. [39701]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Scott to Mr. Walter Sweeney, dated 24 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about fine defaulters.

I will write to you with a full reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce community service orders and combination orders as alternatives to custody for fine defaulters. [39702]

Mr. Maclean: Together with the Lord Chancellor, my right hon. and learned Friend and I are reviewing the powers and procedures available to the courts to ensure that they can enforce payment of fines without restoring to imprisonment save in the most exceptional of circumstances. Alternative options for fine enforcement under consideration include the possibility of a community-based penalty instead of imprisonment for fine default.

Prisoners (Correspondence from Members)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the policy of the Prison Service in respect of opening letters from hon. Members to serving prisoners. [39656]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Scott to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 24 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about Prison Service policy on the opening of letters to prisoners from honourable Members.

I will write to you with a full reply as soon as possible.

Prisoners (Taxis)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 10 July, *Official Report*, column *171*, if he will list the *(a)* destinations and *(b)* cost of each prisoner and accompanying officers transported by taxi at Doncaster prison. [39805]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Scott to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 24 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about (a) destinations and (b) the cost of each prisoner and accompanying officers transported by taxi at Doncaster prison.

I will write to you with a full reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 July, *Official Report*, columns *269–70*, if he will list the *(a)* destinations and *(b)* cost of each prisoner and accompanying officers transported by taxi at The Wolds prison. [39806]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Scott to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 24 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the (a) destinations and (b) cost of each prisoner and accompanying officers transported by taxi at Wolds prison.

I will write to you with a full reply as soon as possible.

Liquor Licensing Legislation (Proposed Charges)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the organisations to which the document "Proposed Changes to the Liquor Licensing Legislation to Extend Permitted Hours on Friday and Saturday Nights", has been distributed; and if he will make a statement on the measures he has taken to consult the public on this issue. [39071]

Mr. Kirkhope: The organisations to which I sent the consultation paper were detailed in the reply I gave on 19 June to a question from the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) at columns *466–67*. I also sent copies to each hon. Member and issued a press release. Publication was widely reported in national and local newspapers and in the trade press. I have made it clear that I welcome comments from any individual or organisation.

Crimes (Firearms)

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* homicides, *(b)* attempted murder and other acts of endangering life, *(c)* other offences of violence against the person, *(d)* robberies, *(e)* burglaries, *(f)* offences of criminal damage and *(g)* other offences were recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used in England and Wales in 1995; [39774]

(2) how many notifiable offences were recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used in England and Wales in 1995. [39773]

Mr. Maclean: The latest available information on offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used was published in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 1994", Cm 3010, chapter 3 and table 3.1. A copy of this publication is in the Library. Figures for 1995 are not yet available.

Prison Farms

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison farms have won prizes for their livestock at agricultural shows; and if he will list them. [39683]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Scott to Mr. Barry Field, dated 24 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General form the office, to reply to your recent Question about prison farms that have won prizes for their livestock at agricultural shows.

I will write to you with a full reply as soon as possible.

Animal Experiments

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will meet representatives of Naturewatch to discuss its proposal for a royal commission on animal experiments; and if he will make a statement. [39567]

Mr. Sackville: I have received a letter from Naturewatch requesting a meeting. I am replying that I can see no purpose in such a meeting and am not persuaded of the need for a royal commission.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a list of the organisations in Birmingham which his Department has licensed to carry out experiments using animals. [39783]

Mr. Sackville: Section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 prohibits the publication of such information.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visits (i) he and (ii) his Ministers made to *(a)* the Newbury constituency and *(b)* other constituencies in the last 12 months. [39875]

Mr. Howard: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Convicted Prisoners (Earnings)

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will assess the advantages of allowing convicted prisoners to build up a reserve of income earned while in prison which can be paid to them on release; and if he will make a statement. [39881]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Patrick Nicholls, dated 24 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about an assessment of the advantages of allowing convicted prisoners to build up a reserve of income which can be paid to them on release.

I will write to you as soon as possible with a full reply.

Asylum Seekers

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people who had applied for asylum were detained in Birmingham prison during May and June; and what were the nationalities of those detained; [39980]

(2) how many people who had applied for asylum were deported from Birmingham prison during May and June; and what were the nationalities of those deported; [40003]

(3) how many people were detained in Birmingham prison, under Immigration Act powers, in May and June; and what were the nationalities of those detained; [40000]

(4) how many of those people detained in Birmingham prison under Immigration Act powers were deported during May and June; and what were the nationalities of those deported; [40001]

(5) how many people were deported under Immigration Act powers from the United Kingdom for April, May and June; and what were the nationalities of those deported; [40004]

(6) how many people *(a)* applied and *(b)* were granted asylum in January, February, March and April;

and if he will indicate the nationalities of those granted asylum; [40035]

(7) how many people were deported under Immigration Act powers from Winson Green prison in 1995; [40037]

(8) how many women were detained in prison, under Immigration Act powers, in January, February, March, April, May and June; and what were the nationalities of those detained. [40038]

Mr. Kirkhope: I will write to the hon. Member.

Prisoners (Gender Dysphoria)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people imprisoned for longer than two years are receiving treatment for gender dysphoria; [40024]

(2) how many people diagnosed as suffering from gender dysphoria have been imprisoned in each of the last five years. [40025]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 24 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about prisoners who are diagnosed as suffering form gender diaspora.

I will write to you as soon as possible with a full reply.

Special Constabulary

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the report of the working group on the special constabulary has been completed; when it will be available; and if he will make a statement. [40083]

Mr. Maclean: The working group has completed its work and I hope to make an announcement about the Government response to the working group's recommendations shortly. A copy of the report will be placed in the Library as soon as it is available.

Hypnotism Act 1952

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the review of the Hypnotism Act 1952 will be completed; and if revised guidance will be issued. [40084]

Mr. Kirkhope: Consultation with interested parties has now been completed. Guidance to local authorities incorporating revised model conditions to be applied to stage hypnotism performances, will be issued at the beginning of August. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Horseracing Betting Levy

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to publish the report on the impact of the national lottery on the horserace betting levy. [40085]

Mr. Kirkhope: An assessment of the impact of the national lottery on the horserace betting levy has been published today. This fulfils an undertaking made during the passage of the National Lottery etc. Bill.

The paper has been prepared by the economics unit of the Home Office. It examines trends in off-course betting expenditure, on which the levy closely depends. The main conclusions are as follows: off-course betting expenditure during 1995 was 6 per cent. lower in real terms than in 1994; a statistical analysis of trends in off-course betting expenditure suggests that it might have been expected to rise by about 5 per cent. in real terms during this period; the study indicates that the national lottery has reduced spending on off-course betting although other special factors, such as the fixture list, may also be involved; and some uncertainty remains about the importance of other special factors and estimates of the size of the national lottery's effect remain imprecise.

Closed Circuit Television

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 20 June, *Official Report*, columns *141–42*, about funding for closed circuit television, (1) how many cameras it is estimated this funding will lead to; [40097]

(2) how much money has been allocated so far to schemes to install closed circuit television. [40098]

Mr. Maclean: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Correspondence

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will reply to the letter from Ken Peace of the United Reformed Church Tees district council about immigration matters dated 16 May. [39027]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* A reply was sent to Mr. Peace on 22 July.

Departmental Legal Costs

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 July, *Official Report*, column *550*, which sections in his Department made the payments for external legal costs in the cases in which his Departments has been judged to have acted unlawfully; which section or office holder is responsible for ensuring that these external costs are not excessive and how this is achieved; where the records are kept of each case in the last five years in which his Department's actions have been judged to be unlawful; if the personal injury claims arose from the unlawful action; what was the method of recording the total external legal costs of each of these actions; and if Ministers are informed of costs *(a)* as cases progress and *(b)* at the end of a case. [38887]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* My previous reply of 17 July, *Official Report*, column *550*, explained that my Department does not keep central records of all the legal cases against it over the past 200 years. In the circumstances it is impossible to provide the details requested without incurring disproportionate costs.

Prisons (Purposeful Activity)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list (i) the latest

available figures, (ii) the figures for 1992, (iii) those for 1988 and (iv) those for 1987 for the average amount of time prisoners spend in purposeful activity in each category C prison. [38748]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 24 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average amount of time prisoners spend in purposeful activity in each category C prison.

The most recent information is given in the attached table.

The figures for 1987, 1988 and 1992 are currently unavailable. I will write to you when they become available.

Average number of hours per week spent in purposeful activity—Category C prisons

Establishment	*1995–96*	*June 1996*
Acklington	25.8	27.9
Aldington	n/a	n/a
Ashwell	33.9	33.3
Blantyre House	33.4	n/a
Brockhill	34.7	35.6
Camp Hill	28.5	26.7
Channings Wood	28.2	27.4
Coldingley	28.2	n/a
Downview	28.8	32
Erlestoke	31.2	25.3
Everthorpe	29.8	23.2
Featherstone	27.6	24.8
Haverigg	35.2	36.4
Highpoint	22.4	18
Kirklevington	44.9	45.2
Lancaster	25.8	n/a
Latchmere House	61.9	n/a
Lindholme	27.9	26.5
Littlehey	32.2	n/a
Mount	27.0	20
Ranby	32.5	30.4
Risley	28.9	19.5
Send	32.7	35.8
Shepton Mallet	26.2	24.7
Stafford	27.2	28.4
Stocken	33.2	29.3
Usk	35.9	36.7
Verne	30.9	33.2
Wayland	26.2	27.1
Wealstun closed	n/a	n/a
Wellingborough	28.6	n/a
Whatton	32.3	32.8
Wymott	37.4	n/a

Prisons (Rehabilitative Courses)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list (i) the latest available figures, (ii) the figures for 1992, (iii) those for 1988, and (iv) those for 1987 for the average number of hours prisoners spend on rehabilitative courses aimed at addressing *(a)* offending behaviour and *(b)* drug use for each category C prison. [38751]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 24 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of hours prisoners spend on rehabilitative courses aimed at addressing offending behaviour and drug use for each category C prison.

Information is not collected centrally on the number of hours which prisoners spend on rehabilitative courses addressing drug use, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Information on courses designed to address offending behaviour is not available before 1992–93. The latest available figures for the number of completed courses and the hours involved in 1992–93 and 1995–96 for those category C prisons running such courses are given in the attached table.

Sex offender treatment programme

1992–93: total hours 17,040 (no details are available of the breakdown between different establishments, although it is estimated that category C prisons account for 50 per cent. of the total).

1995–96: total hours 32,220.

	Hours
Whatton	8,100
Rochester	1,440
Wayland	4,140
Channings Wood	3,060
Usk	4,140
Littlehey	720
Acklington	2,700
Wymott	5,400
Risley	2,520
Total completions	179

Relapse prevention—Pilot programme in 1995–96

1995–96: 336 hours.

Reasoning and rehabilitation

Not run in any category C prisons at present.

Thinking skills

Figures not available for 1992–93 as this course was piloted in 1993–94.

1995–96: total hours 4,844.

	Hours
Channings Wood	196
Wayland	252
Rochester	644
Whatton	532
Elmley	420
Wymott	1,980
Stocken	840
Total completions	

Prisons (Cell Sharing)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list (i) the latest available figures, (ii) the figures for 1992, (iii) those for 1988 and (iv) those for 1987 for the number of prisoners sharing two to a cell designed for one for each category C prison. [38747]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 24 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners sharing two to a cell designed for one, for each category C prison in 1987, 1988, 1992 and currently.

The latest available information is for June 1996. There were 842 prisoners in category C prisons sharing cells certified to hold one.

The attached table shows the figures for each prison.

Prison	*June 1987*	*June 1988*	*June 1992*	*June 1996*
Stafford	688	394	108	378
Lancaster	106	116	128	106
Camp Hill	152	150	40	0
Shepton Mallet	26	20	114	76
Latchmere House	118	124	0	0
Brockhill	0	0	34	0
Usk	0	0	0	80
Channings Wood	0	0	0	[1]186
Buckley Hall	0	0	0	16
Total	1,090	804	424	842

[1] Following the decanting of a wing for refurbishment.

Prisons (Unlocked Time)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the latest available figures, (ii) the figures for 1992, (iii) those for 1988 and (iv) those for 1987 for the average amount of time prisoners spend unlocked on weekdays for each category C prison. [38749]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 24 July 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average amount of time prisoners spend unlocked on weekdays for each category C prison.

The latest available figures are given in the attached table.

Figures for 1987, 1988 and 1992 are currently unavailable and I will write to you when they are available.

Establishment	*1995–96*	*June 1996*
Acklington	12.1	12.1
Aldington	11.8	11.2
Ashwell	15.5	15.5
Blantyre House	15.3	15.3
Brockhill	12.0	12.3
Camp Hill	12.1	12.1
Channings Wood	11.3	11.3
Coldingley	13.0	13.5
Downview	11.5	11.5
Erlestoke	12.8	11.1
Everthorpe	9.7	8.4
Featherstone	10.3	10.3
Haverigg	12.8	12.8
Highpoint	13.0	13.0
Kirklevington	n/a	n/a
Lancaster	11.5	11.5
Latchmere House	n/a	n/a
Lindholme	15.2	15.2
Littlehey	10.5	10.5
Mount	12.2	12.2
Ranby	13.3	13.0
Risley	10.9	11.0
Send	12.8	12.8
Shepton Mallet	12.0	12.0
Stafford	9.5	n/a
Stocken	12.5	12.5
Usk	12.0	12.0
Verne	14.5	14.5
Wayland	12.0	12.0
Wealstun closed	12.5	11.4
Wellingborough	12.0	12.0
Whatton	12.8	12.8
Wymott	13.3	12.3

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the past 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39149]

Mr. Howard: The Government recognise the crucial role played by small firms in the United Kingdom economy and aim to help them by providing sound economic conditions—keeping inflation and interest rates low; reducing legislative, administrative and taxation burdens; and, where appropriate, provide direct assistance in the form of specialist advice and support and easing access to finance.

Over the past year, my Department has shown its continued commitment to helping small businesses by taking further forward its wide-ranging programme of deregulation. Measures which have come into effect in this period include: the Licensing (Sunday Hours) Act 1995, which abolished the compulsory Sunday afternoon break for on-licensed premises and registered clubs and, subject to the restrictions on shop opening hours in the Sunday Trading Act 1994, permits off-licensees to sell alcohol from 10 am until 10.30 pm on Sundays; an order to relax certain controls on greyhound racing; an order introducing provisional special hours certificates for licensed premises and reinstating the hour lost to nightclubs at the start of summer time; an order to repeal the "long pull" offence of serving over-measures of alcohol; and an order to amend the law on gaming machines and betting office facilities to provide for, among other things, £10 all cash amusement-with-prizes machines and more jackpot machines in permitted premises.

In addition, draft deregulation orders have been laid which will allow 16 and 17-year-olds on approved training schemes to work in the bars of licensed premises and extend betting office licences and bookmakers' permits to three years.

In May we announced the Government's decisions on the fire safety scrutiny and issued a consultation document containing draft regulations to implement the outstanding fire safety aspects of the European Community framework and workplace directives. The aims of our work on fire safety have been to maintain necessary fire standards and

to meet our EC obligations in a way which minimises burdens on business.

Many of the deregulatory measures which were given effect this year by the Home Office were started in the previous 12 months; the achievements of that period were given in my reply of 19 July 1995 to my hon. Friend.

Since the beginning of the deregulation programme, 13 of the 38 Home Office regulations which impact on business have so far been repealed or amended.

Further candidates for deregulation are under active consideration.

Small businesses also continue to benefit from Home Office action on crime prevention. Our programme of introducing closed circuit television across the country is progressing well. On 21 June, I announced the results of the second CCTV challenge competition: 259 winning bidders are sharing the prize fund of over £17 million, in amounts ranging from £3,000 to £250,000. On the same day, I announced a further challenge competition, with £15 million available, for 1997–98. Many small businesses have benefited from reductions in crime following the introduction of CCTV cameras in their areas. Crime prevention guides for small retailers have been widely distributed to all business link shops and a large number of retail organisations.

The Home Office and its agencies have signed the CBI's prompt payment code outlining good practice in handling payments. We are committed to improving our performance, and particularly recognise the impact of late payment on small suppliers. We have recently appointed a small business adviser and issued a new guidance booklet for suppliers which contains information on prompt payment, including a direct contact point for late payment complaints. It also includes information on business links and opportunities for small firms.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 25 June, *Official Report*, column *67*, how many interim awards have been made in each of the last three years to applicants by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board; and how long each applicant had been waiting when they received their interim awards. [39016]

Mr. Maclean: The board advises me that 6,492 interim awards were made in 1993–94, 4,885 in 1994–95 and 6,391 in 1995–96, the latter being a provisional figure.

Interim awards are made in appropriate cases either at the instigation of the board, or on the applicant's request which may be received some time after the original application. Data on the period which had elapsed from the original application to an interim payment in each case are not readily available, but the board's records indicate that in the above cases the shortest period was five months and the longest 26 months.

Landmark Education

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many employees of *(a)* the Prison Service and *(b)* his Department have been sent on courses run by Landmark Education; and if he will list the numbers in each grade in each case; [37998]

(2) what is the cost to public funds of sending employees of the Prison Service on courses run by Landmark Education to date; and what cost is projected for 1996–97 and 1997–98; [37999]

(3) what inquiries have been made as to the links between Landmark Education and Erhard Seminar Training in the United States. [38000]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* The information requested is not readily available from individual Prison Service establishments and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. There is no record of any member of Home Office staff outside Prison Service establishments attending any course run by Landmark Education over the past three years. No inquiries have been made about this organisation.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Michael: To ask the secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* contracts entered into with and *(b)* funds provided to (i) the Forum, (ii) the Breakthrough Foundation and (iii) Youth at Risk by (1) the Prison Service and (2) his Department; and what representations have been made by (i), (ii) and (iii) to (1) and (2). [38001]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* The Home Office and its agencies have not had any contracts with, nor provided funds to, the Forum, the Breakthrough Foundation or Youth at Risk. In an organisation as large and diverse as the Home Office it is not possible to record every single approach by such organisations, but we are aware that the Prison Service has sent a representative to a Youth at Risk presentation and information from both Forum and Youth at Risk has been received by it in the form of mail-shots.

Statistical Forms

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the statistical forms issued to businesses by his Department indicating the number of each sent out. [38679]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* My Department does not issue any forms to businesses on a regular basis although ad hoc surveys of businesses are carried out from time to time. The last one to be carried out involving the issue of questionnaires was carried out on a voluntary basis in 1994. Some 850 questionnaires were issued to inform policy on the extent and circumstances of heavy goods vehicle theft.

Fire Safety Cover

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will meet the Fire Brigades Union, hon. Members and other interested parties to discuss the problems of fire safety cover. [38942]

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* My right hon. and learned Friend would like to consider this request, but the hon. Member has not been specific enough about which hon. Members and the subject matter to be discussed or whether it is a general request or concerns a particular fire authority. However, on the position in respect of the hon. Member's own fire

authority my right hon. and noble Friend wrote to the hon. Member on 19 July.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Farm Woodland Premium Scheme

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes are proposed to the farm woodland premium scheme. [40043]

Mr. Baldry: The farm woodland premium scheme has been the subject of evaluations and a policy review. The Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have today laid before the House a report setting out the changes proposed; subject to approval by Parliament and the European Commission, most changes will take effect from next April. A consultation document will be issued shortly.

Beef Farmers

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how he proposes to allocate the 34 mecu of aid for United Kingdom beef farmers agreed by the Agriculture Council at its meeting on 24 to 26 June; and if he will make a statement. [40045]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Agriculture Ministers have agreed to distribute this money to beef producers in respect of the number of adult clean cattle marketed in the period 20 March to 30 June for slaughter for human consumption. We plan to issue forms to producers in the week beginning 5 August and begin payments in late September. Payments will be at a flat rate per animal, to be set once the number of valid claims has been determined. Firm evidence that the animals concerned were on their holding before 20 March and were marketed for slaughter no later than 30 June will be required. In addition to the £29 million—34 mecu—available to farmers under this one-off measure, supplementary payments worth up to £81 million will be made to farmers who received suckler cow and beef special premium for the 1995 scheme years. I welcome the further assistance that will thus be given to hard-pressed beef producers.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the state veterinary service's surveillance of the handling of specified offals in April, May and June; and if he will make a statement. [40079]

Mrs. Browning: The controls on specified bovine material, previously termed specified bovine offals, are central to the protection of public health from any risk from BSE. Full compliance with them is of paramount importance in combating the disease. They require the removal of all those tissues known potentially to harbour BSE infectivity from all cattle at slaughter.

The state veterinary service carries out regular unannounced visits to all plants handling SBMs to monitor their compliance with the controls. Results of its surveillance visits in April, May and June are as follows:

	April 1996			*May 1996*			*June 1996*		
	Number of visits	*Number of unsatisfactory visits*	*Percentage unsatisfactory*	*Number of visits*	*Number of unsatisfactory visits*	*Percentage unsatisfactory*	*Number of visits*	*Number of unsatisfactory visits*	*Percentage unsatisfactory*
Slaughterhouses	281	4	1.4	313	0	0	268	2	0.7
Hunt kennels and knackeries	265	9	3.4	248	13	5.2	213	4	1.9
Rendering plants[1]	13	0	0	10	0	0	11	1	9.1
Incinerators[1]	27	1	3.7	32	1	3.1	24	4	16.7

[1] Rendering plants and incinerators have to be specifically approved to handle SBOs; only a small number of such plants are so approved.

These results demonstrate an overall continuing trend of improvement in the handling of SBMs since the intensive surveillance programme began in September 1995.

It is disappointing that deficiencies continue to be found in small numbers of premises, and pressure is being maintained to improve the situation. However, the majority of the failings in SBM handling found were relatively mild, for example, problems with staining or with record keeping, which would not present a direct risk to public or animal health. There have been no instances of the most serious failing, of leaving spinal cord attached to carcases, since March 1996.

The Meat Hygiene Service is responsible for enforcing the SBM controls in slaughterhouses in Great Britain. The agency has developed detailed new protocols for the application of SBM controls. It has also established arrangements for specific refresher training on SBM controls for all inspection staff, and introduced a programme of SBM audit to ensure that SBM controls are being fully complied with and properly enforced. This is in addition to the surveillance visits carried out by the SVS. To implement the enhanced supervision of SBM, over 300 meat inspection staff have been recruited by the MHS. This intense effort by the MHS to perfect the application of the existing SBM controls is reflected in these SVS surveillance results.

Slaughterhouses face prosecution for significant breaches of the SBM controls, when sufficient evidence is available. At present, two plants have been successfully prosecuted and several more are under investigation with a view to prosecution.

The SVS will continue regular unannounced visits to all plants handling SBMs. The MHS will continue to enforce rules most vigorously, and press for prosecutions where there is sufficient evidence to support a case.

In future information on this subject will be available in the BSE enforcement bulletin which is to be published at the end of each month. Copies of the bulletin will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his Department's estimate of the number of cattle with pre-clinical symptoms of BSE that have been slaughtered and entered the food chain. [32172]

Mrs. Browning: For the purpose of these calculations we have assumed that the risk of exposure of cattle to contaminated feed has not reduced beyond the level experienced in 1990. This is because the number of cases in cattle born in later years is still too small to make more accurate calculations. On the basis of recent modelling studies over 600,000 infected cattle which had not developed clinical symptoms may have been slaughtered for human consumption. The vast majority of these animals would have been born in 1988. It is precisely because we recognised that some pre-clinical cases would enter the human food chain that the SBO, now SBM, controls were introduced in 1989.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the European Commission was notified of Her Majesty's Government's decision to designate the thymus and intestine of calves under six months old as specified bovine offal; and what form that notification took. [35749]

Mrs. Browning: The amendment to the Bovine Offal (Prohibition) Regulations, which extended the specified bovine offal ban to include thymus and intestines from calves under six months of age, was notified to the Commission on 26 July 1994. The notification was made under the emergency provisions of EC directive 83/189, as amended, laying down a procedure for the provision of information in the field of technical standards and regulations.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action was taken to inform *(a)* other EU member states and *(b)* the European Commission of the United Kingdom's decisions and regulations put in place relating to bovine spongiform encephalopathy, with particular reference to public and animal health during *(a)* 1994, and *(b)* 1995. [35748]

Mrs. Browning: All Great Britain legislation relating to BSE which was put in place during 1994 and 1995 was notified to the Commission in accordance with EC directive 83/189, as amended, laying down a procedure for the provision of information in the field of technical standards and regulations.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the highest numbers of BSE cases at an individual farm in Lancashire and North Yorkshire since the epidemic began; and what percentage this represents of the cattle on the farm over that period. [37391]

Mrs. Browning: As at 18 July the highest number of cases on an individual farm, excluding dealers, is 44 for Lancashire and 93 for North Yorkshire. All the 44 cases were homebred; of the 93 cases, only 11 were homebred. Since the epidemic began, this represents 15.7 per cent. of the herd on the Lancashire farm and 22.1 per cent. of the herd on the North Yorkshire farm.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidelines his Department has produced governing the method of removal of the brains of cattle to prevent the spread of BSE into the human food chain; on what date these guidelines were published; what was the interval between publication and the inclusion of brain material as banned specified offal; and if he will make a statement. [37427]

Mrs. Browning: On 13 November 1989 the Bovine Offal Prohibition Regulations came into force which banned the brain and certain other offals for human consumption. Guidance was issued to local authorities on 14 June 1990 which advised MAFF considered that bovine head meat must be recovered from the intact skull before the brain was removed. The Agricultural Select Committee considered the issue of head splitting further and recommended that the harvesting of head meat before the removal of brain should be set down in legislation. The Bovine Offal (Prohibition) (Amendment) Regulations 1992 came into force on 12 March 1992 which prohibited the removal of the brain from the head of a bovine animal in a head boning plant except in an area which was free at all times from food intended for human consumption.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list each occasion in the last two months in which his Department has consulted farmers directly about policy development concerning BSE and the beef crisis; and if he will make a statement. [37365]

Mrs. Browning: During May and June 1996 farming organisations were consulted on the following issues:

	Issues
3 May 1996	Proposal for a mature beef assurance scheme
6 June 1996	Proposal for introduction of cattle passports
7 June 1996	Specified bovine materials (SBM) controls in abattoirs
10 June 1996	Feed recall scheme
12 June 1996	The Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) Regulations 1996
26 June 1996	SBM Controls—treatment of particulate matter derived from SBM

In addition, the Government have written to farmers on a number of occasions to update them on current measures and the Government/industry working group on animal traceability has met regularly during May and June.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the number of cattle that contracted BSE as a result of the failure of renderers to comply in the production, distribution and supply of rendered material with BSE-related control regulations since 1989. [31252]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* No such estimates are available. However, up to 1 July 1996 there have been 27,963 confirmed cases of BSE in animals born after the ruminant protein feed ban, which was introduced in July 1988.

Epidemiological investigations carried out following the occurrence of BSE in animals born after the feed ban suggested that exposure was likely to be from a feed-borne source due to cross-contamination of feeding stuffs containing meat and bone meal at the feed mill, in transit or on farm.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what procedures have been introduced to destroy bovine spongiform encephalopathy infectivity during gelatine purification, what are the arrangements for

ensuring these are implemented; and if he will make a statement. [33893]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 25 June 1996]:* No new procedures have been introduced in the gelatine manufacturing process as the specified bovine materials controls in abattoirs ensure that none of the raw material from which gelatine is produced contains tissues with detectable levels of BSE infectivity. Beyond this it is known that the standard manufacturing methods of gelatine will reduce the infectivity of artificially spiked samples which have BSE material added to them in experiments.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when and in what document, notification was given to *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* standards institutions as listed in list 2 of EU directive 83/1895, EEC, following the United Kingdom Government's decision of 2 November 1994 to prohibit the consumption of the thymus and intestines of calves under six months old. [35470]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* The European Commission was notified on 26 July 1994. The notification was made under the emergency provisions of EC directive 83/189, as amended, laying down a procedure for the provision of information in the field of technical standards and regulations. There was no requirement to send details of this notification to the standards institutions because it was not a standardisation measure.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 11 July *Official Report*, column *307*, how many prosecutions or formal warnings have been issued to persons other than farmers in respect of breaches of specified bovine offal or animal feed regulations. [38197]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 19 July 1996]:* Since 1 April 1995 when the national Meat Hygiene Service took over responsibility for enforcement of controls on specified bovine materials—SBM—in slaughterhouses, we are aware of two successful prosecutions for breaches of these rules. A number of further cases are being investigated with a view to prosecution if sufficient evidence is available. In addition, slaughterhouse operators are informed of any minor breaches of the SBM regulations by MHS officials or state veterinary service officials on an informal and on-going basis to allow them to review and improve their practice. No information on prosecutions for breaches of the specified bovine offal controls prior to 1 April 1995 are available centrally as the enforcement of these regulations then fell to local authorities.

Several instances where mammalian protein has been detected in ruminant feed in feed mills are under investigation with a view to prosecution if sufficient evidence is available.

Intervention Board

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to publish the annual report and accounts 1995–96 for the Intervention Board executive agency. [40075]

Mr. Baldry: I am pleased to advise that the annual report and accounts 1995–96 has been published and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Biotechnology Conference

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library copies of *(a)* the United Kingdom submissions to and *(b)* the final declarations of the international conference on biotechnology safety, held in Denmark from 22 July. [39736]

Mr. Clappison: I have been asked to reply.

I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Beef (Cold Storage)

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his assessment of the amount of beef which is currently being kept in cold storage. [24943]

Mr. Baldry: Our estimate of the amount of raw beef in cold storage on 17 July in the United Kingdom is as follows:

	Tonnes
In interventions stores	22,000
In Beef Stocks Transfer Scheme	[1]30,000
From over 30 Month Cattle Scheme	3,800
Private unsaleable stock	[2]500
Total	56,300

[1] Based on quantity claimed for and therefore includes stocks which may on investigation be ineligible and beef destroyed overseas or not yet returned to the UK.
[2] Based on expressions of interest in Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce Disposal Scheme.

In addition, we estimate that about 65,000 tonnes of beef will be produced this month for UK consumption.

Beef Exports

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the countries that have banned imports of British beef in each year since 1980. [32190]

Mrs. Browning: Commission decision 96/239/EEC of 27 March 1996 provided that the UK shall not export from its territory, meat and meat products obtained from bovine animals in the UK. The list of countries given shows those with a ban on the import of British beef on the day before the introduction of the Commission decision. The month and year when the bans commenced are shown where available.

Importing country	*Date of ban*
Algeria	June 1990
Argentina	August 1991
Bahrain	—
Belgium	March 1996
Bulgaria	September 1994
Canada	March 1996
China	October 1990
France	March 1996
Finland	March 1996
Germany	March 1996
Iran	June 1990

Importing country	*Date of ban*
Iraq	October 1994
Italy	March 1996
Jamaica	September 1991
Japan	July 1990
Jordan	September 1990
Kazakhstan (CIS)	August 1993
Libya	November 1990
Lithuania	April 1995
Malaysia	—
Netherlands	March 1996
Philippines	October 1994
Portugal	March 1996
Russian Federation	September 1993
Saudi Arabia	September 1990
Spain	March 1996
Sweden	March 1996
Switzerland	June 1990
Syria	August 1990
Taiwan	February 1990
United Arab Emirates	August 1990
Uzbekistan	—

The following countries have also introduced, but subsequently lifted, a ban during the period in question:

Chile
Cyprus
Egypt
Kuwait
Lebanon
State of Sarawak (Malaysia)
Mauritius
Morocco
Oman
Poland
Qatar
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those countries currently exercising a ban on the importation of British beef. [28288]

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all those countries which currently have in place restrictions on the import of beef meat or other beef products from the United Kingdom. [29619]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 9 and 16 May 1996]:* I very much regret that the hon. Members have had to wait so long for a reply.

Commission decision 96/239/EC of 27 March 1996 provided that the UK shall not export to any country from its territory meat and meat products obtained from bovine animals slaughtered in the UK. The list of countries records those which placed a ban on imports of British beef before that date.

Abu Dhabi
Argentina
Australia
Bahrain
Belgium
Benin
Brazil
Bulgaria
Canada
Chile
Cyprus
Ecuador
Egypt
Finland
France
French Polynesia
Gabon
Germany
Ghana
Indonesia
Italy
Ivory Coast
Japan
Kazakhstan
Kuwait
Liberia
Libya
Malaysia
Malta
Mauritius
Mayotte
Morocco
Netherlands
New Zealand
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Portugal
Qatar
Russia
Senegal
Seychelles
Singapore
Saudi Arabia
South Africa
South Korea
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Syria
Taiwan
Thailand
Trinidad and Tobago
Vietnam
Yemen
Zaire

In addition, Hong Kong introduced a ban on 28 March 1996.

Forestry Commission Land (Dorset)

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the plots of Forestry Commission land in Dorset which are *(a)* currently for sale and *(b)* being considered for sale; and in each case (i) what is the size of the plot, (ii) what consultation will be made in advance of the sale and (iii) how many representations he has received to date for and against the proposed sale; [38169]

(2) if he will list the plots of land which have been sold by the Forestry Commission in Dorset in each of the last five years; and in each case *(a)* what was the size of the plot, *(b)* what consultation was made in advance of the sale and *(c)* how many representations he received for and against the sale. [38168]

Mr. Boswell: The subjects of the questions relate to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. Gordon Cowie, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Gordon M. Cowie to Mrs. Diana Maddock, dated 24 July 1996:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your Questions about the plots of Forestry Commission land, in Dorset, that are being considered for sale, as well as those that have been sold in the last five years. [38168 & 38169]

There are no plots of Forestry Commission land on the market for sale in Dorset at present. However there are four cases which are being considered for sale and the details are as follows:

Name of property	*Area (ha)*
Alders Coppice	7.0
Black Dog Plantation	3.0
Heathy Field Coppice	4.7
Bryanston Estate	9.5
which consists of the following group:	
Folly Clump	1.5
Four Acre Coppice	2.5
Lower and Higher Prensham	3.0
Beechy Clump	2.5

There have only been two sales completed within the last five years, and their details are as follows:

Year sold	*Name of property*	*Area (ha)*
1992	Blackwater Copse	13.0
1996	Stapehill Wood	3.0

All properties, prior to sale, are notified in the *Estates Gazette*. The proposed sales of Alders coppice and Black Dog plantation were also notified to the local authority under the continued public access arrangements so that they could consider whether they wished to enter into an agreement for a continued public access after sale. In both cases, the local authorities declined the offers to enter into agreements.

There have been no representations on any of the above cases.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* his policies and *(b)* the work of his Department in helping small businesses in the last 12 months as against the previous 12 months; and if he will publish the performance indicators by which his Department monitors the impact and the statistical results of such monitoring. [39138]

Mr. Boswell: The Government recognise the crucial role played by small firms in the UK economy and aims to help them by providing sound economic conditions, keeping inflation and interest rates low; reducing legislative administrative and taxation burdens; and where appropriate provide direct assistance in the form of specialist advice and support and easing access to finance.

MAFF plays an active part in this process. We have appointed a small business Minister who regularly meets small business Ministers from other Departments. This helps to ensure that departmental policies take full account of the needs of small businesses. The rural White Paper published in October 1995 incorporated a number of proposals that will be of interest to small businesses. A progress report, which will be published in the autumn, is currently being prepared. Details of MAFF policy aims and objectives, many of which will be relevant to small businesses interests, are published in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Intervention Board departmental report. A copy of the most recent version, which covers 1995, is available in the Library of the House.

Food Safety

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons the proprietor of a food business was given the right to require the officer of an enforcement authority who is minded to serve an improvement notice under section 10 of the Food Safety Act 1990 to furnish a written notice beforehand giving reasons. [38319]

Mrs. Browning: This is in line with the Government's policy to apply the enforcement procedures contained in section 5 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 in all areas of regulatory activity where this is practicable.

These procedures provide for problems to be ironed out a the earliest stage by giving the right to be warned before enforcement action is taken and a chance to make representations to challenge proposed enforcement action. They also require enforcers to give reasons for taking action and to explain how an appeal can be made.

Enforcement officers may still take immediate action where they consider this to be necessary.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many improvement notices have been served under section 10 of the Food Safety Act 1990 in each year since that date. [38318]

Mrs. Browning: Under section 41 of the Food Safety Act 1990, local authorities, which are responsible for the enforcement of food safety law in the UK, are required to submit statistics to central Government detailing the work, including the number of improvement notices issued, which has been carried out. Data for those years for which complete data are available are as follows.

Year	*Number of improvement notices issued in the UK*
1992	41,641
1993	26,338

Year	*Number of improvement notices issued in the UK*
1994	9,307
1995	5,679

Scrapie

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received requesting assistance from the armed forces to hill farmers in *(a)* culling and *(b)* rounding up flocks of sheep infected with scrapie; and if he will make a statement. [32754]

Mrs. Browning: I have received no such requests in respect of scrapie.

Sheep and Goats Order

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date his Department ensured that his veterinary officials were instructed to take account of the Sheep and Goats (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 1996. [39197]

Mrs. Browning: All state veterinary service staff and technical staff were informed of the forthcoming Sheep and Goats (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 1996 in early September 1995. At that time they were issued with draft guidance notes and instructions to provide copies of the final version, when available, in response to requests for information about the new order. Copies of the order and the final version of the guidance notes were issued to them in February 1996.

Sheep

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reason his Department's officials at Dover prevented consignments of sheep from being loaded on to the MV Cap Afrique on 3 July. [39196]

Mrs. Browning: The proposed sailing of the Cap Afrique on 3 July was postponed by the operator when he established that not all sheep in booked consignments were identified in the manner required by the Sheep and Goats (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 1996.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about transmissible spongiform encephalopathies in sheep. [40046]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer to the statement I made to the House this afternoon.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in which EU-approved abattoirs sheep exported to Spain for further fattening will be slaughtered; and if his Department is informed in advance of which EU-approved future consignments of sheep exported for further fattening are destined. [38410]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* There are no routine mechanisms in place for establishing or notifying in which abattoirs sheep may be slaughtered after they have been transported to Spain for further fattening.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if ovines destined for further fattening unloaded from separate vehicles at Dover Port and re-loaded on to the MV Caroline, on 8 July all originated from the same holding and are being sent to the same consignee. [38415]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Four consignments of sheep for further fattening were loaded on to the MV Caroline on 8 July, originating from three holdings and consigned to three different destinations. The sheep were grouped according to their final destinations.

Agriculture Council

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 22 to 23 July; and if he will make a statement. [40044]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I represented the United Kingdom at this Council. Unanimous agreement was reached on measures to reform the EU fruit and vegetable regime, and on agricultural prices and related measures for 1996–97. The Council also discussed recent developments on BSE.

Agreement on the reform of the fruit and vegetable regime after 18 months of negotiation represented a significant further step in the reform of the EU common agricultural policy. The outcome is consistent with the objectives of the United Kingdom in as much as the reformed regime will reduce significantly the role of withdrawal and destruction of produce as instruments of market support. United Kingdom fruit and vegetable producers will stand to benefit from the reform measures in so far as they provide funds to promote the better marketing and processing of horticultural produce, and protect the future of specialised producer groups which are characteristic of the United Kingdom market.

The 1996–97 agricultural price proposals were also agreed on a basis satisfactory to the United Kingdom. In the arable sector, the Council agreed to fix the 1997–98 rate of set-aside at 5 per cent., and to lift the possibility of penalty set-aside during that year. Set-aside arrangements are to be simplified through a merger of rotational and non-rotational set-aside at a uniform rate of 17.5 per cent. Separately, I obtained assurances from the Agriculture Commissioner that steps will be taken to permit the non-lucrative use of set-aside land by non-profit-making organisations such as charities. I welcome this as a sensible rationalisation of the set-aside rules which responds to public concerns.

The Council also agreed that monthly increments for cereals going into intervention should be cut, as well as sugar storage refunds. Aid rates in the flax sector are to be cut by 7.5 per cent. for 1996–97 and a detailed examination carried out of future support arrangements for this sector on a non-discriminatory basis. An extension of the deadline for carryover of C sugar was agreed for the United Kingdom, a change which had been actively sought by the British sugar industry in order to reflect the longer processing campaign in the UK.

In the livestock sector, the Council placed particular emphasis on the need for urgent measures to help support the EU beef market this autumn because of continued difficulties in the wake of the BSE crisis; there will also be wider-ranging measures later in the year to reduce excess beef production and help producers adapt to changed market circumstances. The Council also committed itself to a reform of the milk regime with a review of the full range of options taking place in 1997. Mindful of the particular problems facing United Kingdom diary producers faced with the accelerated cattle slaughter scheme as part of the BSE eradication programme, the Commission gave welcome assurances on the flexible operation of milk quota leasing up to the end of the milk quota year at 31 March 1997.

The Agriculture Commissioner confirmed that the costs of the prices package could be met within the agricultural guideline for 1996–97.

Linked to the agreement on prices, the Council agreed upon revised income aid rates for hops, a limited extension of transport subsidies for Greece, and an increase in Portugal's sugar quota. The Council also adopted by qualified majority—Spain abstaining—arrangements for implementing agreements under GATT article XXIII and XXIV.6 in the rice sector. I was able to support these proposals. In addition, I obtained assurances from the Commission that early proposals would be made in respect of charges for pesticide evaluation and of uniform principles for authorising plant protection products.

The Council also discussed the latest information regarding BSE. I have reported separately to the House on measures which I am taking in relation to sheep in the light of advice received from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee. I reported my intention in this regard to the Agriculture Council. The French Minister similarly informed the Council of certain health protection measures taken in France as a result of advice received from their equivalent scientific committee. The Council unanimously endorsed the Commission's view that the right way forward was to put all available scientific information before the appropriate specialist committee with a view to establishing common EU rules for the removal of certain tissues of ruminant animals from the human and animal food chain. I welcomed this approach.

Spongiform Encephalopathies

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each publicly supported committee, sub-committee or other body whose responsibilities include spongiform encephalopathies (i) the remit, (ii) the members, with details of their expertise and the date of their appointment and (iii) for each body each research project that has been recommended by such a body for Government funding, together with the amount of money allocated. [20889]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 March 1996]:* There are a number of publicly supported committees on spongiform encephalopathies. I am placing in the Library of the House details of the committees which are listed by the organisation or Department responsible.

Beef Consumption

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the level of beef consumption in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* France, *(c)* Germany, *(d)* Italy, *(e)* Belgium and *(f)* Holland in each of the last six weeks. [25921]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 22 April 1996]:* According to a consumer survey conducted on behalf of the Meat and Livestock Commission, overall beef consumption in the UK in the four weeks to 7 April was down 20 per cent. on the same period last year; down 26 per cent. in the four weeks to 5 May; down 27 per cent. in the four weeks to 2 June; and down 24 per cent. in the four weeks to 30 June, the latest available figure.

For other member states, precise information on beef consumption is not held centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that beef consumption in France, Germany, Italy, Belgium and Holland, and across the EU, is well below normal levels.

Quarantine Kennels

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column *528*, what progress he has made in respect of a standard of animal care in quarantine kennels; and if he will make a statement. [32809]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* I held a meeting on 13 May with representatives of the Quarantine Kennels Owners Association and the Quarantine Kennels Professional Association. A follow-up meeting between the associations and my officials was held on 13 June. We agreed that I would write to authorised quarantine kennels inviting those running them to undertake to abide by the Agriculture Departments of Great Britain's voluntary code of practice on the welfare of dogs and cats in quarantine premises. State veterinary service staff would check compliance with the code during their regular visits. Premises in respect of which an undertaking is given to comply with the code, and where we are satisfied that they are doing so will be identified as such in the Government's literature for potential importers.

Computerised Cattle Database

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with National Milk Records about the development of a national computerised cattle database as part of the bovine sponiform encephalopathy eradication programme. [32935]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* My officials are in regular contact with representatives of National Milk Records concerning animal identification and traceability. National Milk Records is also represented on the joint industry/Government working group on animal identification and this group is being involved in plans for the introduction of a national cattle movement database.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies he has made of computerised cattle databases in other European Union member states. [32940]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* In developing plans for the introduction of a national cattle movement database in Great Britain, we are looking at the databases in Northern Ireland, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Cattle Disposal

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received about the distortion of the market caused by the discrepancy between liveweight and deadweight arrangements under the cattle disposal scheme. [28870]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 May 1996]:* We have received a number of representations about the effect on marketing patterns of the coefficient for converting payments from liveweight to a deadweight basis under this scheme. Any change to the rate is a matter for the European Commission.

Contaminated Feed

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Department last received representation from the French authority about continued export of contaminated feed to that country. [35669]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* The UK told the Commission and other member states of the steps it was taking to prohibit the use of ruminant MBM in ruminant feed in 1988, but it was for other member states to introduce similar domestic restrictions on the use of a material in free circulation and for the Commission to regulate intra-Community trade in this material. At that time MBM could legitimately be exported to other member states as under single market rules it was in free circulation for use in pig and poultry feed.

Organophosphates

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into links between bovine spongiform encephalopathy and the use of organophosphates in cattle; and what conclusions have been reached. [35776]

Mrs. Browning: I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) on 23 July 1996, *Official Report*, column 262.

Rabies

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is able to certify the United Kingdom as a rabies-free country. [36877]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* Yes. The recent isolated case of European bat lyssavirus 2 does not affect our international status as a rabies-free country. The international zoosanitary code of the office international des epizooties—OIE—defines a rabies free country as one in which

"no case of indigenously acquired rabies has been confirmed in man or any other species during the past two years; however this status would not be affected by the isolation of European Bat Lyssavirus (EBL1 or EBL2)."

Although following the bat rabies case it was not possible to sign official veterinary certification for exports for dogs and cats and some other rabies susceptible animals to some countries, this was because the official certification they required contained health assurances on rabies which, because of their specific wording, could no longer be met. All these countries have now been contacted and trade has resumed with those countries to which we export significant numbers of such animals. We are continuing to press those countries which have so far failed to respond.

Environmental Management

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what programmes his Department has introduced to promote good environmental management by farmers; and how many similar programmes were in existence in 1979. [37634]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The Department has numerous programmes in place to promote good environmental management.

These include: free one-to-one advice and publications on pollution and conservation; voluntary incentive schemes to promote environmentally friendly farming and public enjoyment of the countryside; measures to supplement statutory controls on pesticides, including an advisory pesticides forum on responsible pesticide use and a pesticides minimisation initiative; and capital grants for certain works to benefit the environment.

The Department also has an extensive research and development programme to underpin these programmes.

Further details are given in chapters 2, 3 and 7 of MAFF's 1996 departmental report, which is available in the Library of the House.

The Department has greatly expanded its environmental programmes since 1979, in particular through the introduction of voluntary incentive schemes which date from the mid-1980. Voluntary schemes to ensure the safety and efficacy of pesticides were replaced by statutory arrangements in the mid-1980s.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what United Kingdom authority has responsibility for statutory regulations governing live cargo while at sea; and at what point that responsibility ceases when animals are transported across the North sea. [38413]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* A considerable number of provisions, including EU regulations cover controls on the transport of animals, their welfare, and the responsibility for enforcement. Some requirements are placed on the member state of departure, which may be extended if the vessel or aircraft concerned is owned by nationals of that member state, and some on the receiving member state. Within each member state it may be a matter for national government, in one form or another, or a local authority to enforce. All these factors would have to be considered, as would the nature of any breach, when deciding respective responsibilities on journey across the North sea.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list all export health certificates used for trade between the United Kingdom,

Northern Ireland and EU member states between 1991 and 1996 until the implementation of the beef export ban for cattle exported *(a)* for further fattening and *(b)* for slaughter; [38417]

(2) what certification is required in respect of cattle exported from *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* Northern Ireland for immediate slaughter. [38418]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* The certificates used for exports between 1991 and 1996 specifically for *(a)* production cattle (further fattening) and *(b)* slaughter cattle from Great Britain to another member state were certificates EC 56 and EC 57 respectively. These and the equivalent certificates for exports from Northern Ireland were based on the model certificates laid down in directive 64/432. As a result of the export ban no cattle are currently exported from the United Kingdom.

Cattle (Export Health Certificates)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he took to ensure that animals exported with further fattening export health certificates would be slaughtered in EU-approved abattoirs. [38409]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* Responsibility for ensuring that animals exported for further fattening are slaughtered in EC slaughterhouses rests with the member state of destination.

Chinchillas

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what plans he has to review the welfare of chinchillas which are bred for fur; and if he will make a statement; [38791]

(2) which legislation regulates the commercial breeding of chinchillas for fur. [38790]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* As far as I am aware, there are no enterprises breeding chinchillas for fur in this country. If there were, the welfare of the animals concerned would be protected by the general provisions of part I of the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968, which make it an offence to cause unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress, and relevant subordinate legislation. The Council of Europe recommendation on the welfare of fur animals, which contains specific provisions relating to the welfare of chinchillas, is to be reviewed shortly. My officials will be participating in this process but I expect those delegations from countries with first-hand experience of breeding chinchillas for fur to have the major input into that particular part of the review.

Food Infectivity

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent research his Department has evaluated into changes in infectivity of food over time. [36936]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* The Department supports research which will lead to an increased understanding of the contamination, growth and survival of food poisoning organisms in foods. In addition, the Department funds surveillance studies to provide a greater understanding of the incidence and types of food poisoning organisms found in foods.

Food Chain Regulations

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made on the extent to which his Department's regulations relating to the food chain are currently enforced; and what assessment he has made of related risk factors over a five-year period. [36935]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* Local authorities have the main responsibility for enforcing regulations on food and are required to make regular returns to central Government giving details of their food law enforcement activity. MAFF, through its agencies, the Meat Hygiene Service and ADAS, has direct enforcement responsibilities for enforcement of hygiene requirements in licensed fresh meat plants and on-farm milk production. Enforcement action under these arrangements is carefully monitored and where queries arise appropriate follow-up action is taken.

Risk assessment is the responsibility of the relevant enforcement officers. Guidance on this is given in Food Safety Act codes of practice and other guidance issued by the Government. The relevant enforcement officers conduct these risk assessments and use the results in drawing up their inspection programmes of food premises. In addition, the Government are funding a major study into the causes of infectious intestinal disease. This includes the identification of a wide range of factors associated with foodborne infection.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 14 October 1996

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Gambia (Aid)

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the United Kingdom budget per annum in each year since 1979 committed to bilateral aid programmes in Gambia. [39600]

Dr. Liam Fox: United Kingdom gross bilateral aid to the Gambia since 1979 was as follows:

1979–80—£2.00 million
1980–81—£2.32 million
1981–82—£2.48 million
1982–83—£2.40 million
1983–84—£3.64 million
1984–85—£3.61 million
1985–86—£9.90 million
1986–87—£7.20 million
1987–88—£6.53 million
1988–89—£5.10 million
1989–90—£6.37 million
1990–91—£5.75 million
1991–92—£4.88 million
1992–93—£4.39 million
1993–94—£2.76 million
1994–95—£2.23 million.

Estimated spending in 1995–96 was £1.97 million.

Miss Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the United Kingdom budget per annum currently committed to on-going bilateral aid programmes in Gambia. [39562]

Dr. Fox: Spending on on-going bilateral aid programmes in the Gambia is estimated at £1.2 million in 1996–97.

Miss Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the United Kingdom budget for 1994–95 and 1995–96 committed to aid programmes in Gambia through the European Union; and what is the amount allotted for use in voter registration projects in that country. [39575]

Dr. Fox: The European Union committed 2.5 mecu to the Gambia from 1994 to 1996. The United Kingdom share is estimated at £0.29 million.

The United Kingdom and the European Commission jointly provided about £0.9 million this year to fund a voter registration project in the Gambia.

Miss Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the conditions to be met before Her Majesty's Government will lift the United Kingdom aid embargo on Gambia; and what plans he has to review that embargo. [39599]

Dr. Fox: The United Kingdom, along with other members of the European Union, will not consider making new aid commitments in the Gambia until there is a return to a democratically elected civilian Government.

We have, however, jointly with the European Commission, provided help to prepare a voter register. We have made it clear that no further assistance for the elections will be given until the ban on political parties is lifted, political detainees are released or charged, and harassment of the press ceases.

The situation is under constant review.

Southern Rhodesia Public Service

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from former officers of the Southern Rhodesia public service recruited and now living in the United Kingdom about the payment of their pensions; what response he has given; and if he will make a statement. [39588]

Dr. Liam Fox: In recent years, representations have been received from many former members of the public service in Southern Rhodesia about the decline in the sterling value of their pensions. Southern Rhodesia was an independent self-governing colony from 1923; recruitment to its public service was made directly by that Government, and staff served on local as opposed to expatriate terms of service.

The Government of Zimbabwe is responsible for the payment of pensions to former Southern Rhodesia civil servants. Our responsibility is limited to those who were recruited by, or on behalf of, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and who were employed on expatriate terms in the central Government of a colony. There are large numbers of overseas pensioners whose pensions are being eroded by falling exchange rates and, indeed, many who receive no payment at all.

The Government could not justify helping Zimbabwe pensioners in isolation; the financial consequences of assisting all overseas pensioners who find themselves in this position would be prohibitive.

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what would be the cost, including the saving in state benefits, of honouring the undertaking by the Minister of State in 1979 in respect of safeguards under the Zimbabwean constitution for the pensions of former officers of the Southern Rhodesia public service; and if he will bring their pensions within the aegis of the Overseas Pension Act 1973. [39587]

Dr. Fox: The Government of Zimbabwe have honoured their obligation under the constitution by continuing to pay the pensions of those former officers who were employed in the public service in Southern Rhodesia, although the sterling value of these pensions has been eroded through the effects of inflation and adverse exchange rates.

The Government have no plans to bring Southern Rhodesian public service pensions within the scope of the Overseas Pensions Act 1973. The cost of doing so would necessarily be very substantial and would expose Her Majesty's Government to similar pressures from pensioners who served on local terms elsewhere.

Reproductive Health and Family Planning

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications from non-governmental organisations have been received for funding for reproductive health and family planning projects from the seedcorn fund for the financial year 1996–97; and in how many and which countries these non-governmental organisations are based. [39644]

Dr. Liam Fox: The seedcorn fund has received 27 eligible applications from 17 non-governmental organisations for the financial year 1996–97. All applying organisations are based within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 13 December, *Official Report*, columns *664–66*, on allocations from the seedcorn fund for family planning and reproductive health projects, how many and which non-governmental organisations, additional to those listed in the reply, have received funding for reproductive health and family planning projects for each of the financial years 1995–96 and 1996–97; in which countries the NGOs receiving the grants are based; in which countries the funded projects are based; what are these projects; and what is the amount of funding granted and for what length of time. [39779]

Dr. Fox: The following table summarises seedcorn fund grants that have been provided since 13 December. In addition to these, three new projects have been approved in this period. Currently, only UK-based organisations are eligible to apply to the seedcorn fund.

Organisation	*Title*	*Country*	*Budget (£000)*	*Duration*
Marie Stopes International	To Ascertain the Practicalities and Economics of Initiating a Social Publishing Programme in Almaty	Russia	6	1 month
Marie Stopes International	Feasibility Study to Expand Depo-Provera through Nurse Aid Training	Uganda	21	6 months
International Family Health	Community-Based Social Marketing: Testing and Piloting a new Health Production and Information Delivery Strategy	India	297	2 years

Hong Kong Public Service

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what figure would be used under part II of the schedule to the Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) (Pension Supplements) Order 1996 to calculate the notional pension if it were based on a median average rather than a mean average of comparable Hong Kong and United Kingdom civil service grades; what would be the maximum potential cost to the United Kingdom Government if the sterling pension safeguard scheme were based on that figure; and if he will review the scheme in the event that the value of the Hong Kong dollar falls significantly after 30 June 1997. [39682]

Dr. Liam Fox: The notional pension under part II of the schedule to the Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) (Pension Supplements) Order 1996, based on the mean salary differentials between comparable grades in the Hong Kong and United Kingdom public service, is calculated at the rate of HK$21 to £1. If median as opposed to mean salary differentials were used this would not affect the rate. The hypothetical maximum liability to Her Majesty's Government would therefore remain unchanged at £130 million over the lifetime of pensions. The scheme was introduced on 1 July 1996 and is designed to provide a fair and reasonable level of pension protection in the event that there is a significant fall in the value of the Hong Kong dollar. The Government have no plans to make any changes to it.

Burundi

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assessment he has made of the current situation in Burundi; [40089]

(2) if he will make a statement about the current situation in Burundi. [40091]

Dr. Liam Fox: We are deeply concerned about the situation in Burundi and are in close contact with regional leaders and partners. We support efforts by ex-President Nyerere to negotiate a political settlement and welcomed the outcome of the Arusha settlement. We continue to support contingency planning at the UN and within the region for possible international intervention.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received and what discussions he has had about the possibility of intervention in Burundi by the Organisation of African Unity. [40090]

Dr. Fox: The Organisation of African Unity Summit in Yaoundé endorsed the outcome of the Arusha summit. We welcome the decision by the OAU central organ to extend the mandate of the OAU observers and to sent a mission to Burundi.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assistance the British Government have provided and are prepared to offer to Burundi in respect of the current internal conflict; [40092]

(2) what reports he has received about forced repatriation of refugees from Burundi to Rwanda. [40094]

Dr. Fox: United Nations High Commission for Refugees estimates that 17,000 Rwandan refugees have been forcibly repatriated in the current conflict. UNHCR and UN human rights monitors are monitoring the condition of the returnees. Britain has made representations to the Governments of Burundi and Rwanda calling on them to ensure the safety of refugees in their care and that all repatriation is on a voluntary basis. Discussions are also taking place in the UN Security Council.

Britain has provided £2.6 million bilaterally and through the EU to Burundi since January 1996. My right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker intends to visit the region early next month. She will assess further needs.

Tropical Timber

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting on tropical timber held in Geneva from 13 September. [40286]

Dr. Liam Fox: The International Tropical Timber Organisation met in Geneva on 13 September. It was decided that the new international tropical timber agreement, which has now been ratified or provisionally applied by 38 countries including the United Kingdom, should enter into force on 1 January 1997. The new agreement provides an important basis for continued efforts by the international community to improve the management of tropical forests and promote trade in sustainably produced tropical timber.

PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Salaries

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister how many persons working in (i) No. 10 Downing street and (ii) the Cabinet Office are paid more than £43,000 per annum. [40220]

The Prime Minister: The number of payees whose national salary is more than £43,000 per annum in No. 10 Downing street, the Cabinet Office, including the Office of Public Service and its agencies, is as follows:

No. 10: 12

Cabinet Office (including the Office of Public Service and agencies): 116.

Oman University

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what reports he has received regarding the involvement by Mr. Mark Thatcher, in respect of companies in receipt of export credit guarantees from the ECGD, in the construction of a university in Oman; and if he will make a statement; [40277]

(2) what reports he has received that part of the university of Oman has been used for the storage of military equipment or for other military purposes; if these purposes were known to Her Majesty's Government when export credit guarantees were given by the ECGD in relation to the construction of the university; and if he will make a statement. [40215]

The Prime Minister: As far as my office is aware, none.

Parliamentary Recall

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his letter to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 9 September, if he will state the conditions in which he believes the public interest requires Parliament to be recalled, with particular reference to the involvement of British personnel on active service. [40365]

The Prime Minister: A decision to recall Parliament depends upon the prevailing situation. It is made after consultation with colleagues and through the usual channels.

Academy of Sports

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister what advice he sought from voluntary coaches and administrators in *(a)* athletics, *(b)* rowing, *(c)* canoeing, *(d)* swimming and *(e)* cycling (i) prior to and (ii) since his original announcements concerning his proposed academy of sports. [40404]

The Prime Minister: Details of the Government's proposals for the British Academy of Sport were included in the sports policy statement, "Sport: Raising the Game", which was published on 14 July 1995. The policy statement invited the Sports Council to bring forward proposals on what the structure and content of the academy might be, and to consult widely with the sports world on the ideas that might emerge. On 6 December 1995, the Sports Council published a consultation paper on the academy and comments were invited by the end of January. The Sports Council also held a series of consultation meetings with groups of administrators, coaches, performers and specialists from all sports, including representatives of the sports listed.

A prospectus inviting bids to establish the academy was published jointly by the Department of National Heritage and the Sports Council on 24 July. A summary of the consultation was published with it. Bidders have until 31 October to submit their bids.

British Legion

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minster what further correspondence has been received in his office from the Royal British Legion in relation to its call for the setting up of an ex-service affairs unit; what reply has been sent; what action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement. [40374]

The Prime Minister: I have received one recent letter directed from the Royal British Legion regarding the setting up of an ex-service affairs unit. A reply has been sent. The position remains as I detailed in my answer to the hon. Member on 11 March, *Official Report*, columns 434–35.

Poverty Resources

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what policies Her Majesty's Government have established in support of the 1996 United Nations Year for the Eradication of Poverty: and what additional resources have been committed in support of these policies. [40491]

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom has extensive social protection and assistance arrangements, among the most comprehensive in the world. It is by working to maintain and improve living standards through economic and social policies that we will fulfil the aspirations of the United Nations Year for the Eradication of Poverty, and in a way relevant to our society. The most effective way of eradicating poverty is to promote flexible labour markets since this reduces the level of

unemployment. Claimant unemployment has already fallen by over 125,000 so far this year. The UK has more of its people in work and a lower unemployment rate than any other major EU country.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ethnic Minorities

Ms. Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many women from ethnic minorities are employed by his Department and its agencies; at what grade; and what measures he has taken to encourage the *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* employment and *(c)* promotion of women from ethnic minorities within his Department and its agencies. [39898]

Mr. Hanley: Our records, based on voluntary declaration, show that this Department and its agencies employ the following numbers of ethnic minority women:

higher executive officer and above: 8

Executive officer: 19

Administrative officer: 95

Administrative assistant: 27.

We are committed to encouraging the career development of all staff, irrespective of gender or ethnic origin. We have comprehensive programmes in place to ensure equality of access to recruitment, training, career development and promotion for all staff. We monitor all our procedures to ensure implementation.

We actively encourage ethnic minority applicants through our recruitment literature and campaigns and work closely with the Windsor Fellowship. We are also active members of Opportunity 2000.

Hong Kong (US Bombs)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent discovery by Customs at Hong Kong airport of US-made bombs in transit from China to Israel. [40072]

Mr. Hanley: A consignment of inert military ordnance was discovered by the Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department during a routine inspection on 24 May 1996. Charges were laid against the carrier, Hong Kong Dragon Airlines Ltd., for importing prohibited articles without a licence and failing to retain possession of the articles until a valid licence was produced. The airline pleaded guilty and was fined HK$80,000 or £6,600.

Former Yugoslavia

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate of the numbers of soldiers and civilians killed (i) in the attack by Bosnian troops on Serbian troops to the north and north west of Srebrenica and (ii) in the counter-attack by Serbian troops; how many soldiers were hiding their military identity by dressing in civilian clothing; and in what ways such casualties can be distinguished from Bosnians who it is alleged were illegally executed by Serbian troops. [40219]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia—ICTY—is still investigating the fall of Srebrenica last July. We await details. So far, ICTY teams have exhumed 400 to 500 bodies from four sites around Srebrenica.The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that there are 6,000 missing people from the area.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons international warrants have not been issued against *(a)* President Tudjman of Croatia and *(b)* the leaders of the Bosnian Muslims. [40216]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: it is for the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia to decide whom it should indict. We provide significant support for the tribunal's activities, and it has our full confidence.

Western Sahara

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he plans to take to ensure the UN-sponsored referendum on the future of the Western Sahara takes place. [40285]

Mr. Hanley: We are active both in New York and bilaterally in urging Morocco and Polisario to co-operate fully with the UN and MINURSO—in the referendum mission—in order that the identification process can be restarted and lead to the referendum.

I also took the opportunity during my visit to Morocco in June to make our views clear.

Nuclear Co-operation

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy in respect of nuclear co-operation with Russia and China. [40248]

Dr. Liam Fox: In September we signed a bilateral agreement with the Russian Federation on co-operation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The agreement provides a framework within which firms can pursue business and expert exchanges. With our G8 colleagues, we attended the Moscow summit on nuclear safety and security. The summit underlined the close co-operation between Russia and the G7 in solving nuclear safety problems in eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union. It also identified further action to be pursued. Russia has now ratified the international convention on nuclear safety, and signed the Vienna convention on nuclear liability.

China is becoming increasingly important in the civil nuclear power section. We are actively seeking to strengthen our civil nuclear co-operation with them at both official and industry levels. We welcome China's decision to attend the conference on nuclear safety in Asia, to be held in Tokyo on 5 and 6 November, which the United Kingdom will also attend.

Human Rights

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department has a system for grading the human rights performances of individual countries. [40162]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We do not maintain any league table of human rights violators, though we receive detailed information from our embassies and high commissions as well as from outside bodies, including non-governmental organisations, on the human rights performance of various countries.

Burma

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will estimate the value of the contribution made by British businesses to the economy in 1996 of Burma with particular reference to tourism; and if he will make a statement. [40136]

Mr. Hanley: The value of United Kingdom trade with Burma and of UK investment there is low. We are aware of only two UK companies which have made direct investment in the tourism industry in Burma. The amount of tourism-related goods and services exported from the UK is also small. More may be channelled through third countries, but it is difficult to estimate their value.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for the last year for which figures are available *(a)* the total number of persons who applied for entry clearance as a visitor to the United Kingdom, *(b)* the total number of refusals and *(c)* the countries of origin of those who were refused giving the numbers against each. [40196]

Dr. Liam Fox: The total number of applications for entry clearance to visit the UK in 1995 was 1,167,295.

The total number of refusals for entry clearance to visit the UK in 1995 was 72,626.

The countries of origin of those refused are not currently available. Details will shortly be available from the Home Office's Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 1995.

Galapagos

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 21 May, *Official Report*, column *103*, what contribution has been made by Her Majesty's ambassador in Quito towards the goat eradication scheme on the Galapagos. [40367]

Dr. Fox: The British Ambassador in Quito donated £5,000 for the purchase of equipment required for the goat eradication programme. A contribution of £25,000 from an FCO fund for small environmental projects has also been approved to establish a base station for the programme and to protect threatened plant species, which form an important part of the tortoises' diet.

Russia

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his letter of 13 May, in what ways he has kept up constructive pressure on Russia in relation to radioactive waste management. [40366]

Dr. Fox: Meetings of the International Atomic Energy Agency's contact expert group provide regular opportunities to discuss radioactive waste management issues. Both the UK and Russia are full members. The group, which also co-ordinates and monitors aid for nuclear waste management projects in Russia, met last on 10 and 11 September 1996.

Lake Kojanovskoe

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his letter of 3 April, what action he has taken with the European Commission to counter contamination of Lake Kojanovskoe. [40370]

Dr. Fox: We have yet to decide with our EU partners what concrete assistance might be made available to counter contamination of Lake Kojanovskoe pending consideration of the conclusions of the EU-financed study of contamination levels.

Commission for the Restitution of Monetary Gold

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a formal request to the UK partners on the tripartite gold commission to produce annual reports regarding meetings and expenses. [40650]

Mr. David Davis: We will make a request. I shall write to the hon. Member with the results.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date and in what form he last reported to Parliament on the work of the tripartite commission for the restitution of monetary gold; and if he will make a statement. [40649]

Mr. Davis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, on 12 March 1991, *Official Report*, column *433*.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Probate Service

30. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the future of the probate service. [37957]

Mr. Streeter: Public consultation on proposed changes to the structure of the probate service has now been concluded. The Lord Chancellor is considering the proposals and an announcement will be made as soon as a decision has been reached.

Legal Aid

32. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the review of legal aid. [37959]

Mr. Streeter: The Lord Chancellor published a White Paper on 2 July, setting out the Government's plans for reforming the legal aid scheme in England and Wales. Since then, work has been proceeding on implementing the reforms.

The Legal Aid Board published its plans for expanding block contracting of advice and assistance in the not-for-profit sector in August. It intends to publish proposals for piloting legal aid for family mediation in November, and on advice and assistance contracts with solicitors' firms in early 1997.

33. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has recently received about the cost of the legal aid scheme. [37960]

Mr. Streeter: I frequently receive representations on this matter. As my hon. Friend knows, the Government's proposals for a radical reform of the legal aid scheme were announced by the Lord Chancellor on 2 July, and are contained in the White Paper, "Striking the Balance". These proposals will, among other things, improve control over the cost of legal aid and ensure that the taxpayer obtains good value for the money spent.

Mediation

34. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will take steps to promote the concept of mediation in the civil and family law systems in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [37961]

Mr. Streeter: In England and Wales my Department has developed a number of initiatives to encourage the use of mediation where it is appropriate. In January of this year, my Department published the guide, "Resolving Disputes Without Going to Court". It contains information on a range of alternatives to litigation and is available free from county courts. A pilot scheme has been introduced at the Central London county court to help people settle a wide range of disputes through mediation.

The Family Law Act 1996 contains measures designed to promote the use of family mediation as an alternative to litigation. The reforms of the legal aid scheme that the Lord Chancellor announced in July would allow new types of service to be provided under legal aid. Family mediation will be an early priority and, in time, the scheme could be extended to allow civil mediation services to be provided to people who qualify for legal aid.

Public Record Office Papers

35. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which are the oldest papers in the Public Record Office which have not been placed in the public domain. [37962]

Mr. Streeter: The oldest papers in the Public Record Office which have not yet been placed in the public domain are some papers from Dublin castle records in a ledger dated 1853–1920, Public Record Office reference CO 904/6. These papers have now been cleared for release and will be available shortly.

Magistrates Courts

36. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates courts there were in Wales in 1978; and how many are operating in 1996. [37963]

Mr. Streeter: There are at present 63 magistrates courts in Wales. No accurate record exists for the number of magistrates courts in Wales in 1978.

Sheriffs

37. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he is taking to increase the public accountability of sheriffs and under-sheriffs. [37964]

Mr. Streeter: On 2 April my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) announced to the House, *Official Report*, column *87*, the work currently planned in connection with the Lord Chancellor's review of civil enforcement agents. No decision has yet been made on the issue of the accountability of high sheriffs, under sheriffs and sheriff's officers.

Children Act 1989

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 July, *Official Report*, columns *18–19*, if he will make arrangements for all guidance on the provisions of and procedures under the Children Act 1989 for court staff and judiciary to be placed in the Library. [39929]

Mr. Streeter: Yes. The following will be placed in the Library:

Children Act 1989—Court Staff Handbook

Children Act 1989—Judicial Information Booklet

Children Act 1989—Guidance to Listing Officers

Children Act 1989—Court User Guide.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the report, "Domestic Violence and Child Contact Arrangements in England and Denmark" by Marianne Hester and Lorraine Radford, Policy Press 1996, a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement. [39930]

Mr. Streeter: The findings of this report will be considered carefully in connection with the implementation of the Family Law Act 1996. Where conflict occurs in connection with child contact arrangements, remedies are available within the Act and elsewhere to deal with it in order to ensure that both children and adults are properly protected against domestic violence.

Legal Profession

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the reasons for the growth in both branches of the legal profession since 1970; and what assessment he has made of their optimum size. [37950]

Mr. Streeter: None. The legal profession is independent of Government and self-regulating. Its size is determined by the demand for legal services.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoner Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest estimate of the numbers of prisoners in United Kingdom *(a)* open and *(b)* closed prisons; and what were the corresponding figures for 1991. [40053]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Barry Jones, dated 14 October 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the latest estimate of the numbers of prisoners in United Kingdom open and closed prisons; and the corresponding figures for 1991.

On 31 July 1996, there were 4,650 prisoners in open prisons and 51,500 persons in closed prisons in England and Wales. These figures include prisoners held in young offender institutions.

Information for 30 June 1991 is published in "Prison statistics, England and Wales", table 1.7 of the 1991 edition, column 2157; annual average population figures are given in table 1.6. A copy of "Prison statistics" is available in the Library.

Information for Scotland and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women from ethnic minorities are employed by his Department and its agencies; at what grade; and what measures he has taken to encourage the *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* employment and *(c)* promotion of women from ethic minorities with his Department and its agencies. [39897]

Mr. Howard: The Home Office and its agencies employ a total of 1,252 women known to be from ethnic minorities. Details of their grades are given in the following tables. The Directors General of the Prison Service and of the Forensic Science Service, and the chief executives of the UK Passport Agency and the Fire Service College have provided the figures for their agencies.

The Home Office follows the Cabinet Office's programmes for action to achieve equality of opportunity in the civil service for people of ethnic minority origin and for women. Recruitment advertisements, which encourage applications from people regardless of background—including ethnic origin or gender—are placed in the ethnic minority press. A number of measures are being taken to foster links with those from ethnic minorities, including substantial involvement with the Windsor Fellowship and the National Mentoring Consortium and links with community relations councils. In the Prison Service, governors have also been encouraged to make particular efforts to attract applications from women and from those of ethnic minority origin.

The Department has widely publicised procedures for combating harassment and discrimination.

Steps are being taken to encourage more ethnic minority staff to train as members of recruitment and promotion boards with the aim that boards include one member of ethnic minority origin wherever possible. All advertisements for promotion boards carry a statement which makes it clear that the Department is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for all staff regardless of factors such as ethnicity or gender.

The Department monitors the progress of staff according to ethnicity and gender, including aspects such as recruitment, grade level, promotion and staff report markings.

Home Office (excluding agencies)

Grades[1]	*Number of female staff from ethnic minorities*
Grade 7	[2]*
Senior executive officer (SEO)	7
Higher executive officer (HEO)	14
Executive officer (EO)	160
Administrative Officer (AO)	378
Administrative assistant (AA)	225

[1] Grades given in this and the following tables include grade equivalents (except where Prison Service grades are shown separately).
[2] Asterisks denote five staff or fewer to avoid the possibility of individuals being identified.

Her Majesty's (HM) Prison Service

Grades	*Number of female staff from ethnic minorities*
Senior executive officer (SEO)	[1]*
Higher executive officer (HEO)	[1]*
Executive officer (EO)	20
Administrative officer(AO)	101
Administrative assistant (AA)	53
Senior officer[2]	[1]*
Prison officer[2]	79
Prison auxiliary[2]	11
Night patrol[2]	12
Chaplain[2]	[1]*
Nursing grades[2]	35
Psychologist grades[2]	[1]*
Medial officer[2]	[1]*
Professional and technical officer[2]	[1]*
Instructional officer[2]	[1]*
Pharmacist grades[2]	[1]*

HM Prison Service is in the process of transferring to a new computer system and as a result there may be inaccuracies in the above data.
[1] Asterisks denote five staff or fewer to avoid the possibility of individuals being identified.
[2] HM Prison Service grades.

UK Passport Agency

Grades	*Number of female staff from ethnic minorities*
Executive officer (EO)	7
Administrative officer (AO)	48
Administrative assistant (AA)	42

Forensic Science Service

Grades	*Number of female staff from ethnic minorities*
Senior forensic scientist	[1]*
Assistant forensic scientist	12
Higher executive officer (HEO)	[1]*
Administrative office (AO)	[1]*
Administrative assistant (AA)	16

[1]Asterisks denote five staff or fewer to avoid the possibility of individuals being identified.

Fire Service College

Grade	*Number of female staff from ethnic minorities*
Nursing grade 1	[1]*

[1]Asterisks denote five staff or fewer to avoid the possibility of individuals being identified.

Nigerian Citizens

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Nigerian citizens have been compulsorily returned to Nigeria since November 1995, and what reports he has received of their present situation. [40283]

Mr. Kirkhope: The statistics available relate to the total number of Nigerian citizens removed from the United Kingdom to all countries. Some 350 Nigerians were refused leave to enter and removed from the United Kingdom in the period November 1995 to July 1996. In addition, 290 Nigerians were removed as illegal entrants or persons subject to deportation action; this figure includes persons who departed voluntarily after enforcement action had been initiated. I have received no reports of their present situation.

Casinos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many registered casinos there are in England and Wales; and if he will list them. [40117]

Mr. Kirkhope: On March 31 1996, there were 107 licensed casinos in England and Wales. They were, by area:

Birkenhead
Stanley Wirral casino

Birmingham
China Palace casino
Grosvenor casino
Midland Wheel casino
Rainbow casino
Stakis Regency International casino

Blackpool
Castle casino
Grosvenor casino

Bolton
Stanley casino

Bournemouth
Grosvenor casino
Stakis Regency casino
Stanley casino

Bradford
Napoleons casino club
Stakis Regency casino

Brighton
Grosvenor casino
International casino club

Bristol
Annabelle casino
Grosvenor casino (2)
Stakis Regency casino

Coventry
Annabelle casino
Stakis Regency casino
Stanley casino

Derby
Carlton casino
Hamblin Grand casino

Dudley
Castle Hill casino

Great Yarmouth
Grosvenor casino
Kings casino

Hove
Grosvenor casino

Huddersfield
Grosvenor casino

Kingston-upon-Hull
Stakis Regency casino

Leeds
Grosvenor casino (2)
Napoleons casino club
Stakis Regency casino

Leicester
Annabelle casino
Stanley casino

Liverpool
Grosvenor casino
Stanley casino
Stanley grand casino

London
Aspinall's club
Barracuda club
Chester's casino
Clermont club
Colony club
Crockfords club
Cromwell Mint
Golden Horseshoe
Golden Nuggett
Grosvenor Connoisseur casino
Grosvenor casino
Grosvenor Victoria casino
Les Ambassadeurs
London Park Tower
Maxims casino club

Napoleons casino
Palm Beach casino
Rendezvous casino club
Ritz casino
Sportsmen club
Stakis Regency casino

Luton
Grosvenor casino
Stanley casino

Lytham St Annes
Clifton casino

Manchester
Grosvenor casino (3)
Stanley Midland casino
Stanley Strand casino

Margate
Regal sporting club
Stanley casino

newcastle upon Tyne
Casino Royale
Grosvenor casino
Stanley Grey's casino

Northampton
Stakis Regency casino

Nottingham
Stakis Chevalier casino
Stakis Regency casino

Plymouth
Grand casino
Grosvenor casino

Portsmouth
Grosvenor casino (2)
Stanley casino

Ramsgate
Grosvenor casino

Reading
Grosvenor casino
Reading sporting club

Salford
Stanley Albion casino

Scarborough
Grosvenor casino

Sheffield
Bonapartes casino club
Grosvenor casino
Napoleon Bonapartes gaming club

Southampton
Grosvenor casino
Stanley casino

Southend on Sea
Waterfront casino club
Westcliff sporting club

Southport
Stanley casino

Stockport
Stakis Regency casino

Stoke on Trent
Stanley casino

Sunderland
Grosvenor casino

Teeside-Middlesborough
Stakis Regency casino

Torbay
Torquay casino

Walsall
Royal casino

Wolverhampton
Stakis Regency casino

Cardiff
Grosvenor casino
Les Croupiers casino
Stakis Regency casino

Swansea
Annabelle casino
Grosvenor casino

Internet

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is taking to outlaw the downloading and publication of obscene material from the Internet which would be illegal if produced in printed form. [40548]

Mr. Sackville: I will write to the hon. Member.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Millennium Exhibition

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the companies which have so far stated their intention to contribute to the millennium site. [40198]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The companies which have so far publicly stated their intention to contribute to sponsorship of the millennium exhibition are Abbey National, Amec, BAA, Barclays bank, British Aerospace, British Airways, British Telecommunications, BSkyB, British Petroleum, General Electric Company, Hanson Energy, Lloyds bank, London Electricity, Marks and Spencer, Midland bank, National Westminster bank, Reuters and Siemens. The Corporation of London has also pledged support.

Ministerial Accommodation

Mr. Allen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what nursery accommodation is available to Her Majesty's Ministers in their Departments. [40265]

The Deputy Prime Minister: Departments and agencies have delegated responsibility to establish nursery and childcare schemes for children of civil servants. Departments wishing to establish a workplace nursery must be able to justify it in terms of value for money and contain the cost within existing running costs. Parents

wishing to use any of these schemes are normally required to make a contribution to the costs, comparable to private sector schemes.

Ministers of the Crown are able to make use of a departmental nursery on the same basis as civil servants.

Nationally, 53 civil service nurseries have been established and 120 holiday play schemes run during school holidays. In addition, the civil service is in partnership with other organisations in 23 nurseries and buys places in 16 others.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Attorney-General what is his Department's budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media, specifying separately the Solicitor-General's staff. [39347]

The Attorney-General: No separate budget is held for this purpose.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Attorney-General (1) what is the cost budgeted for staff employed full time or part time to provide information and publicity in 1996–97 in his Department and that of the Solicitor-General; [39446]

(2) how many staff are assumed in his Department's budget, employed (i) full time and (ii) part time, *(a)* to work on press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97; [39336]

(3) what was the cost of staff employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* to work on the press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95, and (iii) 1993–94, showing separately staff of the Solicitor-General; [39409]

(4) how many staff were employed full time or part time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94; [39421]

(5) what is the cost assumed in the budget of people employed full time or part time to work on the press and the media in 1996–97. [39982]

The Attorney-General: The information is shown in the table.

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Crown Prosecution Service	Not available (7+1 part-time)	£283,800 (10+1 part-time)	£288,800 (11+1 part-time)	£277,700 (11+1 part-time)
Serious Fraud Office	£69,000 (3)	£79,500 (4+2 part-time)	£80,000 (4+1 part-time)	£93,000 (4)
Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers[4] Treasury Solicitor's Department	—	—	—	£14,800 (1)
Government Property Lawyers	—	—	—	—

Figures before the brackets indicate the costs[1] of staff engaged in providing information, publicity, press and media services.[2] Figures in brackets indicate the numbers of staff so engaged.[3]

[1] These figures comprise salary, superannuation (estimated where precise figure is unknown), ERNIC payments and allowances. CPS costs for 1993–94 are not available.
[2] It is not possible to distinguish between these categories of services since in practice they overlap and are provided by the same staff.
[3] These figures do not include staff providing these services incidentally to, or inseparably from, other functions.
[4] No separate costs are incurred in relation to the Solicitor-General.

ISC-Ferranti

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement in respect of the removal by an agency of Her Majesty's Government of *(a)* files and *(b)* other evidence from the offices of ISC in west London, following the announcement by Sir Derek Alun Jones in respect of fraud at the company; what was the nature of such material; what steps were taken by his office to ensure that it was properly preserved and examined by investigating authorities; and what action was taken as a result of such an examination. [40209]

The Attorney-General: My answer relates only to the Serious Fraud Office for which I have ministerial responsibility. On 12 September 1989 an announcement was made by Sir Derek Alun Jones to the effect that the company was carrying out an internal investigation into some of its overseas contracts and that the annual general meeting of the company would be adjourned until 10 October 1989. Shortly thereafter the Serious Fraud Office commenced its preliminary investigation. Neither the Serious Fraud Office nor police officers working with it at any time removed files or other evidence from the offices of ISC in west London. Certain documentation originating from the offices of ISC (London) plc and ISC (Technologies) Ltd. was however produced to the SFO by Ferranti's solicitors. Where copies were taken by the SFO, they were analysed and preserved in the normal way. The investigation was carried out in close co-operation with the United States' prosecuting authorities. Seventeen individuals and three corporations were subsequently indicted in the United States on charges of fraud in respect of which I refer the hon. Member to my previous answers to him of 24 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *459–60*.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Tourism

15. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will estimate how many tourists will visit Britain in 1996. [37938]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The British Tourist Authority currently estimates that there will be 25.8 million overseas visitors to the UK this year, up 7 per cent. on 1995, with expenditure at over £13 billion, an 8 per cent. increase on last year.

22. **Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received on the impact on the tourism industry of a minimum wage. [37946]

Mrs. Bottomley: Tourism industry leaders, including the main trade body, the British Hospitality Association, have expressed their concern about the introduction of a national minimum wage. A minimum wage would cause job losses and restrict the creation of new jobs. The impact on more vulnerable young and unskilled workers would be particularly damaging.

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the level of investment in tourism projects in the North-west region. [39992]

Mr. Sproat: The North West tourist board receives funding from the English tourist board to develop the quality of the tourism product in north-west England. The ETB subvention to the NWTB was £414,000 in 1995–96. The NWTB raised a further £1.42 million in income from commercial activities and local authority and commercial members' subscriptions. Tourism in the region also benefits from the single regeneration budget, and from Objective 1 status for Merseyside and objective 2 status for Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cumbria under the European regional development fund. Twenty-eight mecu is allocated to tourism and cultural projects within the 1994 to 1999 objective 1 programme in Merseyside, and 24 mecu within the 1994 to 1996 objective 2 programme in Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cumbria.

National Lottery

16. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions her Department has had with *(a)* the Arts Council and *(b)* the Sports Council on the subject of directing lottery funds to assist young talented individuals. [37939]

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend announced today that lottery money, joined with funds from central Government, will be used to finance a three-year scheme to assist students of dance and drama to take up places at accredited training institutions in England. The scheme will be administered by the Arts Council of England.

23. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the criteria by which lottery proceeds are distributed to specific projects. [37947]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The proceeds set aside from the national lottery for the five good causes are distributed by 11 bodies.

Each of these bodies to set application criteria taking account of the directions issued to them under section 26 of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993. Decisions on applications are made independently of the Government.

Yorkshire County Cricket Club

17. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the representations made to her Department on the relocation of the Yorkshire county cricket club. [37941]

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend and I have received a small number of representations about the relocation of the Yorkshire county cricket club away from Headingley, its current headquarters. Yorkshire county cricket club announced on 7 October that it intended to relocate to Wakefield. This is entirely a matter for the club.

Film Industry

18. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what recent consultations she has had with representatives of the film industry. [37942]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have regular consultations with representatives of the film industry on a wide range of film-related issues. Specifically this summer I visited the United States of America where I met leading figures from the American film industry including representatives from MCA, Warner Bros. and the Motion Picture Association of America.

More recently, I attended the Edinburgh film festival, and visited Shepperton studios and the Warner Bros. feature animation studio in central London.

National Museums Day

19. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received regarding National Museums Day. [37943]

Mr. Sproat: I understand that Museums Week was a tremendous success and my right hon. Friend is looking forward to the meeting she shall be having, on 17 October, with Mr. Loyd Grossman, chairman of the Campaign for Museums, who has been responsible for the campaign. Six hundred and ninety-nine museums took part in the Week, and over 300 Members of Parliament visited their local museums, many on National Museums Day.

Arts Policy

20. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on arts policy. [37944]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: On 30 July 1996 I published "Setting the Scene: the Arts and Young People", the first major Government policy statement on the arts for many years.

Minority Sports

21. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to encourage minority British sports. [37945]

Mr. Sproat: The Government encourage the development of all lawful sports throughout the country. A wide range of high-quality services and support are made available by the Sports Council to all recognised sporting activities.

Arts Group Tours

24. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what measures she is considering to encourage touring by arts groups. [37948]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: On 1 April 1996 I announced a new direction to the Arts Council of England under the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 requiring it to take into account the desirability of facilitating access to and participation in the arts. I believe that enabling touring companies to travel to new venues and communities in isolated areas is an important priority in increasing access.

Public Libraries

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the future of public library services. [37921]

Mr. Sproat: Work on the public library review is well advanced, and I expect to make an announcement about its conclusions in the near future.

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many women from ethnic minorities are employed by her Department and its agencies; at what grade; and what measures she has taken to encourage the *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* employment and *(c)* promotion of women from ethnic minorities within her Department and its agencies. [39893]

Mr. Sproat: The numbers of women from ethnic minorities employed by Department of National Heritage and its agencies, by grade, are listed in the table. The following measures are taken by DNH and its agencies to encourage the recruitment, employment and promotion of women from ethnic minorities.

The Department and its agencies are equal opportunities employers and state this when advertising all vacancies. When recruiting externally, normally through the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency, vacancies are advertised in papers aimed at ethnic minorities.

Two thirds of the Royal Parks agency staff are police officers and we always ensure that police vacancies are advertised in the ethnic press. The agency are also considering the recommendations of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary contained in its report "Developing diversity in the Police Service".

The Department has an equal opportunities statement and policy and an equal opportunities officer. Every possible step is taken to ensure that decisions on recruitment, selection, training and promotion are based solely on objective and job-related criteria.

Grade (shows new DNH grades and equivalent in the Agencies)	*Department of National Heritage*	*Royal Parks Agency*	*Historic Royal Palaces*
B=HEO/SEO	1	—	—
C=EO	4	1	1
D(U)=AO	4	3	6
D(L)=AA	7	1	14
Police Constable	—	1	—
Police Sergeant	—	1	—

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Business Links

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many personal business advisers are currently employed by business links. [39855]

Mr. Page: It is estimated that there are currently around 530 personal business advisers working for business links.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list the target group of growth businesses used by each business link, by number of employees; [39854]

(2) what proportion of business links use *(a)* 10 to 200 employees, *(b)* five to 200 employees and *(c)* some other definition as their target group. [39852]

Mr. Page: The definition of target groups is a matter for each business link. Information is not held centrally.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of *(a)* personal business advisers, *(b)* export development councillors and *(c)* innovation and technology advisers at (i) each business link and (ii) in total have been appointed by business links without reference to his Department's personnel. [39853]

Mr. Page: Business links recruit personal business advisers, export development counsellors and innovation and technology counsellors against a background of criteria and guidance agreed by the national business link partners including my Department.

Each business link is an independent private sector organisation and decisions on whom it employs are a matter for it. However, where requested by the business link, officials of my Department, or the relevant regional government office, have occasionally been involved by participating in the selection process for personal business advisers and innovation and technology counsellors; and have regularly been involved in the selection process for export development counsellors.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research his Department has recently undertaken into barriers to growth for small firms; and what his Department has identified as the main barriers. [39859]

Mr. Page: The Department has undertaken and published a number of studies which examine particular barriers to growth for small firms:

'Management Training for Growth SMEs' (1995) looked at linkages between small and medium enterprises investment in management training and business growth. It also identified factors that are likely to limit the ability of the firm to maximise the benefits of external management training.

'Globalisation of SMEs' (1994) discusses the factors affecting the globlisation process and the resource and organisational difficulties encountered by SMEs.

'Small Firms in the Inner City' (1993) was involved in identifying the different opportunities for growth as well as the constraints on the development of firms in different types of location.

The Department is due to publish shortly two other reports that relate to barriers to growth for small firms:

'Growth Constraints on SMEs' explores barriers to growth of SMEs in internationally tradeable sectors. It will identify the main barriers and assess how companies identify and manage constraints.

'Franchising' examines the role of business format franchising as a strategy to facilitate small firm growth.

Large Firm Outsourcing

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what evidence his Department has evaluated regarding the proportion of large firm outsourcing which goes to *(a)* large firms, *(b)* small firms and *(c)* self-employed people. [39860]

Mr. Page: The information requested is not available.

Company Sizes

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of the work force in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* European Union countries were in enterprises with (i) one to nine, (ii) 10 to 49, (iii) 50 to 249 and (iv) over 250 employees in the last year for which figures are available. [39858]

Mr. Nelson: Estimates of the percentage of the workforce by size class for non-government enterprises are given in the table. There are no figures available that include central and local government.

Work-force by size distribution of UK and EUR 15 enterprises[1]

Number of employees	*Percentages*	
	UK	*EUR 15*
1–9	17.4	23.1
10-49	16.4	18.8
50-249	12.9	14.9
250+	40.3	33.8

Notes:
[1] Excludes agriculture.
UK 1994.
EUR 15 1992.
Source:
DTI and Eurostat.

Aggregates

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was *(a)* the value and *(b)* the volume of (i) exports and (ii) imports of aggregates from and to the United Kingdom in each of the last five years. [39621]

Mr. Nelson: The information is published by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in the "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom", which is available in the Library of the House. Aggregates are classified to heading 273.4 of the standard international trade classification.

Channel 35

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans his Department has for the allocation of the Channel 35 frequency for analogue or digital use. [39742]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government announced on 16 September the arrangements for the future of frequency Channel 35. Channel 5 Broadcasting will have access to the frequency for five years to enhance the population coverage of its service. As the market for advanced digital services develops, channel 35 will be redeployed to facilitate the new broadcasting opportunities. The arrangements oblige Channel 5 Broadcasting to inform viewers in areas using Channel 35, at the point of their VCR retuning campaign, that access to the channel is time limited and that Channel 5 will need to consider other options for reception at the end of the five-year period.

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Abbott: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many women from ethnic minorities are employed by his Department and its agencies; at what grade; and what measures he has taken to encourage the *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* employment and *(c)* promotion of women from ethnic minorities within his Department and its agencies. [39896]

Mr. John M. Taylor: On 19 July 1996 the DTI, excluding its executive agencies, employed 454 female staff of ethnic minority origin in the following grade levels:

Grade level	*Number*
Senior Civil Service	0
SEO-G6 level	8
HEO level	19
EO level	64
AO level	223
AA level	140

Recruitment levels are very low at the moment. However, where we run recruitment campaigns, vacancies are usually advertised in the ethnic minority press. We also, where appropriate, use positive action statements to encourage applications from the ethnic minority community.

Since September 1994, line managers have been responsible for selecting staff for internal transfers and promotions to posts up to and including G7 level.

All staff involved in recruitment and promotion decisions are trained in selection techniques and in avoiding discrimination. Equal opportunities awareness training also forms an integral part of the Department's induction and managerial courses. Ethnic minority women may also apply to undertake positive action training.

I have asked the chief executives of the DTI's executive agencies to respond direct to the hon. Member.

Letter from Jim Norton to Ms Diane Abbott, dated 14 October 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency to your Parliamentary Question.

The Radiocommunications Agency employs 16 women from ethnic minorities. All are in the Administration and Secretarial Groups which cover typists and secretaries, administration and executive staff.

The Radiocommunications Agency's Equal Opportunities Policy Statement and Programme of Action underpin our commitment as an Equal Opportunities employer. As such, all advertised posts are open to applicants from the ethnic minorities. The managers involved in the selection and promotion procedures are fully trained in equal opportunities to ensure fairness and impartiality. Indeed, at present, all of our staff are receiving training in equal opportunities.

As part of the Agency's Training and Development Strategy, appropriate training is provided to help staff develop and prepare for career opportunities. Such training is available to all staff in the Agency.

Letter from John S. Holden to Ms Dianne Abbott, dated 14 October 1996:

You recently tabled a Parliamentary Question for the President of the Board of Trade on ethnic minority women employed within DTI and its agencies. I am responding as Chief Executive of Companies House.

30 women members of staff have identified themselves as being of ethnic minority origin. Their grades are as follows:

Grade	*Number*
HEO	1
EO	1
AO	8
AA	9
SGB2	11
Total	30

Companies House is fully committed to the principles of equal opportunity and to recruiting and promoting on merit.

We are training all staff, including managers, on the anti-discrimination legislation and Companies House policy in this area.

The Agency monitors the recruitment, development and promotion of ethnic minority staff, men and women, to enhance awareness and equality of treatment.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Ms Diane Abbott, dated 14 October 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about the employment of women from ethnic minorities in The Insolvency Service.

At 19 July 1996, The Insolvency Service employed on a permanent basis 86 female staff recorded as of ethnic minority origin in the following grade levels:

Senior Civil Service: 0

SEO-Grade 6 level: 2

HEO level: 6

EO level: 12

AO level: 23

AA level: 43

Staff within The Service responsible for recruitment exercises are trained and certificated in selection procedures and techniques. Equal opportunities awareness, including best practice in the avoidance of unfair discrimination, forms an integral part of staff recruitment and promotion panel training.

The Service is also responsible for internal promotions of staff up to Grade 6 level and each panel includes a member of staff from The Service's Personnel Section.

To encourage the employment and career development of women of all ethnic origins, The Service offers a career break scheme, part-time working, flexible working hours and job-sharing where it is possible to do so.

Letter from J. C. Octon to Ms Diane Abbott, dated 14 October 1996:

In the absence of the Chief Executive I am replying for the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade about the employment of women from ethnic minorities.

The Patent Office currently employs fewer than five women of ethnic minorities. I therefore regret that I cannot disclose the precise number or their grades for to do so would risk identification of the individuals concerned and thereby contravene the Code of Practice governing the use of data on ethnic origin.

The Patent Office has been reducing in numbers for some years and in consequence has carried out very little recruitment. However, we take our responsibilities in this field seriously. Our recruitment advertisements all state that we are an equal opportunities employer and that we welcome applications from men and women of all backgrounds and ethnic groups, including those with disabilities.

Promotion opportunities have also been rather limited in recent years but our aim is to ensure that the best candidate is selected. Our training procedures for promotion boards reflect the need to keep bias out of the selection and promotion processes and to ensure that equal opportunities legislation is respected.

Letter from Seton Bennett to Ms Diane Abbott, dated 14 October 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about the employment of women from ethnic minorities.

This Agency employs less than five people in the group specified in your question. I am therefore not able to provide a detailed response as to do so would contravene the Code of Practice on the use of ethnic origin data. The Code prescribes that data should not be disclosed in a form that would allow individuals to be identified.

With regard to the second part of your question, NWML follows the guidance given by the "Positive Action" initiative. In this respect, we advertise vacant posts to ensure that all those eligible to apply have the opportunity to do so, including ethnic minority women. The same policy applies to promotion opportunities.

Company Ownership

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of *(a)* manufacturing, *(b)* industrial production and *(c)* gross domestic product is produced by foreign-owned United Kingdom companies; and what are the equivalent figures for *(a)* other G7 countries and *(b)* other EU member states. [40247]

Mr. Lang: According to the annual census of production, 23 per cent. of UK manufacturing gross value added at factor cost was attributed to foreign-owned enterprises in 1992, the latest year for which data are available. Similar data are not available for industrial production or GDP for the UK. There are no similar international data for manufacturing, industrial production or GDP.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library a list of all United Kingdom-registered companies which are owned or majority-owned by foreign individuals or businesses; and if he will specify the type of industry of each company so controlled. [40246]

Mr. Lang: Disclosure of individual shareholder nationality is not a requirement of the Companies Act and therefore Companies House has no knowledge of the nationality of individual shareholders. If the company is a subsidiary, the directors are obliged to disclose its ultimate parent company, its name and country of incorporation. This information could only be obtained from Companies House at disproportionate cost.

Low Pay

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to increase wage levels in respect of low-paid workers. [39999]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) on 24 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *482*.

Mobile Telephone Services (Contracts)

Mr. Dowd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to eliminate unfair contracts between mobile telephone service providers and consumers; and if he will make a statement. [40195]

Mr. Ian Taylor: From 1 July 1995, the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1994 introduced a general concept of fairness into consumer contract law in the United Kingdom. Companies, including service providers in the mobile telecommunications industry, who deal with consumers and use standard form contracts must ensure that they do not use unfair terms. An unfair term is defined as one which, contrary to the requirement of good faith, causes a significant imbalance in the parties' rights and obligations under the contract to the detriment of the consumer. A consumer is not bound by a standard term if that term is unfair. Subject to this, service providers and dealers in the mobile phone industry are free to set their own contract conditions in competition with the many other companies in the mobile telephone market. Consumers are also free to shop around to find the best possible package which suits their mobile phone needs and requirements. The Federation of Communication Services, the mobile phone industry's main representative body, has also introduced a quality initiative "FCSQ" which provides significant safeguards for the consumer. Those in the industry who are members of this scheme display a "Q" quality mark, and consumers may wish to look for this mark when taking out a mobile phone contract.

Sasea Finance Ltd. and Sasea Intertrade

Mr. Gapes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what examination his inspectors have made of liquidators' reports on Finance Ltd. and Sasea Intertrade; what action his Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* proposes to take as a result; and if he will make a statement [40169]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Sasea Finance Ltd. went into liquidation on 14 October 1992. The joint liquidators Messrs D. J. Pallen and S. G. Franklin lodged their report under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986—CDDA—on 5 May 1994. The liquidators reported that the company's accounting records were maintained abroad and had been impounded by the Swiss authorities for the purpose of other inquiries. All the directors were foreign nationals resident abroad.

Sasea Intertrade Company Ltd. went into liquidation on 16 June 1994. Mr. Pallen was again appointed liquidator and he reported under the CDDA on 15 September 1994. Again the company's directors were all foreign nationals resident abroad and the company's records remained impounded by the Swiss authorities for other inquiries.

The reports were considered by the Department's disqualification unit, but in the absence of the companies' directors and of the companies' records the unit was not in a position further to investigate the conduct of the directors or able to form a view as to whether disqualification proceedings were appropriate in the public interest. As a result, no proceedings were instigated.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what records have been examined by inspectors of his Department relating to the movement of the assets of Sasea Finance Ltd. and Sasea Intertrade immediately prior to their liquidation; what action his Department proposes to take as a result of its examination; and if he will make a statement. [40168]

Mr. Taylor: It is not my Department's policy to comment on individual companies.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what claims and of what amounts were made by *(a)* Sasea Finance Ltd. and *(b)* Sasea Intertrade from the Export Credits Guarantee Department between 1985 and 1991. [40167]

Mr. Nelson: None. The ECGD has no record of having issued a guarantee to either Sasea Finance Ltd. or Sasea Intertrade 1985 and 1991.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what claims and of what amounts were made by companies associated with directors of *(a)* Sasea Finance Ltd. and *(b)* Sasea Intertrade from the Export Credits Guarantee Department between 1985 and 1991. [40166]

Mr. Nelson: None. ECGD has no record of having issued a guarantee to any company associated with the directors of Sasea Finance Ltd. or Sasea Intertrade between 1985 and 1991.

Mr. Grapes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total deficiency at *(a)* Sasea Finance Ltd. and *(b)* Sasea Intertrade reported to his Department by the liquidators; and if he will list the principle creditors for each company. [40165]

Mr Taylor: Detailed statements of affairs of the companies were not submitted by the directors but the liquidators estimate that the total deficiency of Sasea Finance Ltd. was £184.9 million.

The main liabilities were to Sasea Holding and connected companies £70.7 million; trade and expense creditors £109 million and shareholders £5 million.

The estimated total deficiency of Sasea Intertrade Company Ltd. was £93.04 million. The main liabilities were to Sasea Holding £34.95 million, Sasea Trading Ltd. £45.86 million, non-group creditors £10.23 million and shareholders £2 million.

Hot Rolled Coil

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the latest figures by *(a)* cash value and *(b)* tonnage relating to the import and export of hot rolled coil. [40054]

Mr. Page: The information for 1995 is given in the following table:

	Imports	Exports
Value[1]	105.9	296.2
Volume[2]	276.2	982.3

Notes:
[1] *£ million.*
[2] Thousand tonnes.
Source:
The Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau.

Military and Civil Aircraft

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the latest figures concerning the value of *(a)* military and *(b)* civil aircraft imported into and exported from the United Kingdom in the last available period. [40055]

Mr. Nelson: The information for 1995 is given in the following table:

UK aircraft imports and exports

£ million

	Imports	Exports
Civil	804	961
Other	38	183

Source:
DTI analysis of overseas trade statistics of the United Kingdom.

Export Credits (Oman)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what dates and for what amounts export credit guarantees given by the Export Credits Guarantee Department were drawn upon in relation to the construction of a university in Oman. [40164]

Mr. Nelson: The ECGD supported buyer credit loans are administered by the relevant agent bank which holds full details of advances made. While the ECGD has data about aggregate amounts which the bank declares as having been advanced and repaid, only part of the record for this particular case is available on the ECGD's current database. Research into the full information held by the ECGD could not be done, except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what dates, and for what amounts export credit guarantees were given by the Export Credits Guarantee Department in relation to the construction of a university in Oman. [40172]

Mr. Nelson: The ECGD gave its guarantee for a US$235.19 million loan on 30 July 1982 for the construction of the University. The scope of this credit facility was extended to allow the financing of a teaching hospital which was within the terms of a contract variation order. A further loan of US$20.69 million was signed on 14 July 1988 for that purpose.

Electricity Market (Liberalisation)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the implications for potential investors in, and users of, electricity generated by renewable technologies of the European Union decision to liberalise the electricity market. [40343]

Mr. Page: The introduction of competition in the European Union electricity market will offer opportunities for all investors in the electricity industry and produce benefits for consumers. The text agreed by Energy Ministers allows member states to give preferential treatment to generating installations using renewable energy sources.

Factory Closures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many factories have closed in the United Kingdom since October 1989. [40272]

Mr. Nelson: The information requested is not available.

Banana Audio Terminals

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President to the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the regulation of the use of banana terminals with audio speakers. [40290]

Mr. Ian Taylor: It is not clear to which regulation the hon. Member refers. If he provides me with detailed information, my Department will look into the matter.

Air Quality Strategy Document

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when his Department intends to publish the air quality strategy document. [40058]

Mr. Page: A public consultation draft of the United Kingdom national air quality strategy was published by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 21 August.

Radio Spectrum

Mr. Timms: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the outcome of the Government's view of the mechanism which provides independent oversight of spectrum management. [40317]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government announced in their White Paper "Spectrum Management: into the 21st Century", Cm 3252, that, in the light of public consultation, they did not intended to set up a standing advisory committee on spectrum management issues at present. This position also reflects the views of the stage 3 spectrum review, conducted by Sir Colin Fielding CB, that such a committee would add little to the series of spectrum reviews, which the Government have agreed in principle to continue. The Radiocommunication Agency will keep under review the effectiveness of its consultative arrangements.

Coal Investments (Liabilities)

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement in respect of liabilities reverting to the Coal Authority following the collapse of Coal Investments and give the costs so far incurred in meeting those liabilities. [40335]

Mr. Page: This is a matter for the Coal Authority.

JET Fusion Project

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what expenditure the United Kingdom has made via UKAEA—AEA Technology for *(a)* the JET fusion project and *(b)* other fusion projects (i) in the last year and (ii) since the beginning of the European fusion programme; [40324]

(2) what expenditure the United Kingdom has made via Euratom for *(a)* the JET fusion project and *(b)* other fusion projects (i) in the last year and (ii) since the beginning of the European fusion programme. [40323]

Mr. Page: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 13 June, *Official Report*, column *265*.

Subsidence Claims

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each year since June 1990 *(a)* the total number of subsidence claims lodged with British Coal and the Coal Authority; *(b)* the number currently outstanding and *(c)* the total amount paid in respect of such claims. [40334]

Mr. Page: The information requested is summarised in the following table. Figures are provided for financial years commencing from April 1990.

The data have been extracted from the annual reports on coal mining subsidence damage submitted to the Secretary of State by the Coal Authority—previously by British Coal—which are available in the Library of the House.

Questions	*Years*					
	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
(a) Number of subsidence claims made in year	8,315	7,868	9,532	10,458	10,582	9,259
(b) Number of claims outstanding at year end	16,512	14,573	13,269	12,845	13,582	11,511
(c) Total amount paid in respect of such claims (£)	38,424,522	41,502,787	49,907,814	47,501,244	36,773,381	30,850,816

Departmental Press Office

Ms Hodge: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the cost assumed in the budget, of people employed full-time or part-time, to work on press and media in 1996–97.

Mr. John M. Taylor: For 1996–97, the pay budget for staff employed in the Press Office is £891,000.

TRANSPORT

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what investigations his Department made into the registration of each of the fishing vessels Mar Azul and Mar Blanco owned by Messrs. Hooktowe of Ayr in respect of their *(a)* original builders and use, *(b)* previous owners, *(c)* previous registrations and *(d)* information relating to any de-commissioning grant authorised under the common fisheries policy. [39670]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Nigel Spearing, dated 24 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question enquiring what investigations were made into the registration of the fishing vessels "Mar Azul" and "Mar Blanco" in respect of their (a) original builders and use, (b) previous owners, (c) previous registrations and (d) any information relating to any decommissioning grant authorised under the Common Fisheries Policy.

The following information was supplied on application for registration:

MAR AZUL

(a) *Original Builder & Use*

Astilleros De Santander SA, Spain.

Information on usage not required by the regulations and not known by the MSA.

(b) and (c) *Previous Owners and Registrations*

Vessel previously owned by Pesquerias Mar Azul SA and registered in Panama.

Vessel transferred to UK register on 27 October 1992 as owned by Benno Ltd of 292 Upper Street, Islington, London.

Vessel currently owned by Benno Ltd of Unit 1, Havens Head Business Park, The Docks, Milford Haven.

(d) *Information on Decommissioning Grant*

This information is not held by this Agency but by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

MAR BLANCO

(a) *Original Builders and Use*

Astilleros Del Atlanticos SA, Spain.

Information on usage not required by the regulations and not know by the MSA.

(b) and (c) *Previous Owners and Registrations*

Vessel previously owned by Pesquerios Mar Azul SA and registered in Panama.

Vessel transferred to UK register on 27 October 1992 as owned by Berga Ltd of 292 Upper Street, Islington, London.

Vessel currently owned by Berga Ltd of Unit 1, Havens Head Business Park, The Docks, Milford Haven.

(d) *Information on Decommissioning Grant*

This information is not held by this Agency but by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

North London Line

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to visit the north London line. [40110]

Mr. Bowis: My right hon. Friend has no current plans to do so.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what statutory responsibilities he has in relation to plans to *(a)* modernise, *(b)* otherwise develop and *(c)* extend the use of the north London line by Railtrack. [40109]

Mr. Bowis: There are currently no plans to develop the north London line, following the recent completion of the electrification works to enable Eurostar services to run

north of London. In the event of any future proposal to extend the infrastructure, the Secretary of State would be called upon to consider whether powers should be granted under the Transport and Works Act 1992 to enable the development to proceed.

In addition, under the Railway and Other Transport Systems (Approval of Works, Plant and Equipment) Regulations 1994, the Health and Safety Executive, acting for the Secretary of State, is required to approve any proposal to bring into use any new or altered railway works.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many applications he has received for consents by Railtrack with regard to the north London line. [40108]

Mr. Bowis: None. Railtrack's electrification work on the north London line, to enable Eurostar services to run north of London, was carried out under contractual arrangements between the company and the works contractors. That work is now complete.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet the board of Railtrack or its representatives in relation to the north London line. [40106]

Mr. Bowis: There are no current plans for such a meeting.

Railtrack

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what statutory responsibilities he has for the environmental impact of the activities of Railtrack. [40107]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack has, as required under the terms of its network licence, provided the Rail Regulator with a statement of its policy for protecting the environment from the effects of its licensed activities, together with operational objectives and management arrangements for giving effect to the policy. The policy, operational objectives and management arrangements are subject to review as appropriate.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last received a report on the consultative mechanisms utilised by Railtrack in furtherance of its statutory powers. [40111]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack's network licence requires it to comply with arrangements involving consultative committees. Oversight of these arrangements is the responsibility of the Rail Regulator.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to review the definition of track maintenance in relation to the activities of Railtrack. [40112]

Mr. Watts: None.

Road Building

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in respect of which roads in the national roads programme his Department has completed a review of possible alternatives to road building. [40061]

Mr. Watts: Before entering the national roads programme, every scheme is assessed to ensure both that it is the most practical and cost-effective method of dealing with the identified problem, and that it would be consistent with current policies. Once in the programme, schemes are subject to public scrutiny both at a public consultation and later before an independent inspector at a public inquiry. At both these stages, alternatives to road building can be suggested and will be objectively assessed.

Electronic Retuning Equipment

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the potential environmental impact of the use of electronic retuning equipment to achieve maximum power from cars; and if he will make a statement. [40348]

Mr. Bowis: Electronic engine management chips containing a revised engine calibration to maximise power output are available. This practice is known as "hot-chipping". We have no data on how hot-chipping may affect engine emissions.

However, it is an offence under regulation 61 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 to use or cause or permit a motor vehicle to be used on a road if, as a result of an alteration to the propulsion unit or exhaust system of the vehicle, it fails to meet any of the specific emission standards in that regulation to which the vehicle was originally built.

Test Stations

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many MOT stations are registered with the vehicle inspectorate; and what has been the figure in each of the last five years; [40353]

(2) how many inspections of MOT stations were conducted in each of the last five years; [40355]

(3) how many prosecutions there have been in each of the last five years against MOT stations for illegally issuing MOT certificates; [40350]

(4) how many vehicle inspectorate staff are employed to check that MOT stations comply with the requirements of the test; and what has been the figure in each of the last five years; [40354]

(5) what is his policy for dealing with MOT stations which are found to have passed unfit vehicles; and if he will make a statement; [40356]

(6) what estimate he has made of the number of vehicles used on the road *(a)* without an MOT certificate and *(b)* with an illegal MOT certificate. [40352]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 14 October 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions on:

(i) the number of MOT stations registered with the Vehicle Inspectorate (VI) for the last 5 years;

(ii) the number of inspections of MOT stations conducted in the last 5 years;

(iii) the number of prosecutions against MOT stations for illegally issuing MOT certificates;

(iv) the number of Vehicle Inspectorate staff employed by VI to check that MOT stations comply with the requirements of the test for the last 5 years;

(v) an estimate of the number of vehicles used on the road a) without an MOT certificate and b) with an illegal MOT certificate; and

vi) the policy for dealing with MOT stations which have passed unfit vehicles.

Details of the number of MOT stations authorised, the number of MOT station standards control inspections for the last 5 years, and the number of VI examiners employed to check that MOT stations comply with testing requirements over the past 2 years, are provided in the attached tables. The numbers of VI examiners employed on MOT supervisory activities before 1994/95 can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

There are no precise figures on MOT evasion or the use of vehicles with an illegal MOT certificate. It is likely that the level of MOT evasion is similar to the level of VED evasion since a valid MOT test certificate must be produced at the time of VED relicensing.

Procedures for dealing with MOT stations which fail to comply with MOT standards are outlined in the "MOT Testing Guide" available from HMSO bookshops. Depending on the severity of the case and the past history of the test station, action can range from advice and formal warnings through to the removal of the authorisation to test vehicles for up to 5 years. These sanctions are effective, and it is therefore seldom necessary to bring prosecution proceedings.

Number of authorised examiners

	Private garages	*Others*
1991–92	17,081	470
1992–93	17,460	463
1993–94	17,362	451
1994–95	18,421	453
1995–96	18,456	438

"Others" includes test stations operated by post offices, designated local authorities, the Crown, and some police authorities.

Number of vehicle inspectorate enforcement vehicle examiners (average staff in post) employed on MOT standards control activity

These figures exclude overtime and any training or project work that may have been undertaken directly connected to the MOT Scheme.

1995–96: 97.2

1994–95: 97.6

Number of inspections conducted on MOT stations

1991–92: 40,976

1992–93: 38,827

1993–94: 42,446

1994–95: 43,785

1995–96: 44,029

Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he authorised the publication of his Department's proposals to extend the definition of electrically assisted pedal cycles which are exempt from the definition of motor vehicle found in the Road Traffic Acts; if he will list *(a)* the names of the members of the working group of the vehicle standards and engineering division of his Department and the names of the organisations which they represent and *(b)* the nature and number of the bodies or persons to whom the letter of 21 August, which set out options for such extension, was distributed. [40446]

Mr. Bowis: The Government have made no such proposals. They have, however, sought views in this area. I authorised publication of this consultation document on 19 August. The working group was not an internal departmental working group. Representatives attended from the following outside organisations: the Electric Vehicle Association, the Motorcycle Industry Association, W. R. Pashley Ltd., Sinclair Research Ltd., Citibike Manufacturing Company Ltd. and TGA Electric Leisure. In addition, there were officials from the Department's vehicle standards and engineering division; road safety division; transport policy unit; deregulation unit; local transport policy division; and driver and vehicle licensing policy division; and from the Department of Trade and Industry's vehicle division and deregulation division.

Approximately 450 organisations and individuals were sent a copy of the consultation document. They included road safety organisations, local authorities, associations, bodies representing the motor vehicle and pedal cycle industries, user groups, the police and transport consultants. They also included all the people who attended the forum on cycling policy organised by the Department on 10 July.

Rail Services (North-East)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the Government's timetable is for franchising British Rail's Regional Railways' north-east passenger services. [40240]

Mr. Watts: The Franchising Director issued an information memorandum for the Regional Railways North East franchise on 23 September on which pre-qualifiers for the franchise can base their indicative, non-binding bids. The deadline to lodge indicative bids is 24 October. Formal invitations to tender will be issued later on in the franchising process. The Franchising Director expects to award the franchise in spring 1997.

Bidders have been asked in their indications of interest to consider the options for older rolling stock which is nearing life expiry, and are invited to bring forward self-financing proposals for upgrading the trans-Pennine express services.

Coach and Bus Accidents

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* deaths *(b)* serious injuries and *(c)* minor injuries were caused to coach and bus passengers in each of the last 10 years excluding motorway accidents; and what percentage of the passengers in each category were standing. [40308]

Mr. Bowis: The numbers of bus and coach passenger casualties in non-motorway accidents in Great Britain are as follows for each of the last 10 years, together with the proportion who were standing in each injury category.

Year	Death	Percentage standing	Serious injuries	Percentage standing	Minor injuries	Percentage standing
1986	22	36	757	31	8,128	35
1987	12	42	727	33	7,600	32
1988	14	36	793	34	7,996	32
1989	18	11	757	33	8,627	31
1990	16	19	682	31	8,361	32
1991	25	28	624	31	7,444	32
1992	13	31	567	34	7,718	30
1993	22	18	610	30	7,845	28
1994	19	16	703	29	8,395	25
1995	21	24	699	26	7,643	27

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* deaths, *(b)* serious injuries and *(c)* minor injuries were caused to coach and bus passengers in motorway accidents in each of the last 10 years; and what percentage of the passengers in each category were standing. [40470]

Mr. Bowis: The numbers of bus and coach passenger casualties in motorway accidents in Great Britain are as follows for each of the last 10 years, together with the proportion who were standing in each injury category.

Year	Deaths	Percentage standing	Serious	Percentage standing	Minor	Percentage standing
1986	1	100	24	13	92	4
1987	3	0	30	3	187	2
1988	0	0	26	0	101	5
1989	1	0	4	0	126	2
1990	0	0	39	0	194	4
1991	0	0	14	0	110	5
1992	3	0	10	10	114	6
1993	10	0	24	0	146	1
1994	1	0	29	3	196	2
1995	13	0	17	18	143	3

Bus and Coach Safety

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated regarding the safety of standing passengers on buses and coaches; and if he will make a statement. [40309]

Mr. Bowis: The Department has commissioned research to examine the safety implications of EU proposals for harmonised bus construction. Safety of standing passengers will form one element of this work. The programme is planned to conclude in mid 1997.

Routemaster Buses

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement regarding the future of Routemaster buses. [40300]

Mr. Bowis: As long as Routemaster buses remain mechanically sound and meet the appropriate standards which apply to all public service vehicles, there is no reason why operators should not continue to keep them in service.

Motorists (Mobile Telephones)

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many motorists have been *(a)* reported, *(b)* prosecuted and *(c)* convicted for using a hand-held mobile telephone while driving; and if he will make a statement. [39931]

Mr. Bowis: Using a hand-held mobile telephone while driving is not an offence, but a driver doing so may well be prosecuted for careless or inconsiderate driving or for failing to exercise proper control of a vehicle. Information on how many cases relate to the use of hand-held mobile telephones could be obtained only from original court records and only at disproportionate cost.

East London Line

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to ensure that a co-ordinator is appointed to supervise the necessary preparatory work on the proposals for the southern extensions of the east London line; [40184]

(2) how many companies have expressed an interest in bidding for construction of the east London line extensions; and if he will name them; [40186]

(3) what is the potential number of passengers that his Department estimates could transfer from the roads to a southern extension of the east London underground line to East Croydon, travelling *(a)* northwards and *(b)* southwards; [40193]

(4) what percentage of the east London line extensions costs he expects to be from public funds; [40187]

(5) what discussions he has had with the Deputy Prime Minister regarding the significance of the possible southern extension of the east London line with regard to access to the Millennium site at Greenwich, including access from Gatwick airport. [40197]

Mr. Bowis: Extensions to the east London line are a matter for London Underground Ltd., which is examining the possibilities of a scheme under the private finance initiative for northern and southern extensions. This work

includes assessing demand for, and costs of, the possible routes of a southern extension, and consultations with the private sector on the scope for private finance. Some 40 companies have responded to those consultations, expressing interest in the project. I understand, however, that so far it seems likely that a significant proportion of the costs of any such scheme might need to be met from public fund; LUL will need to consider any proposals alongside their other spending priorities.

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the east London line to reopen. [40185]

Mr. Bowis: I understand that London Underground is planning to reopen the east London line next summer.

Traffic Increases (Millennium Site)

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what increase in road traffic in terms of passenger numbers, car journeys and road freight through the trunk routes of south-east London his Department estimates will occur *(a)* during the construction of the Millennium site at Greenwich and *(b)* following its opening; [40192]

(2) what increase in rail and road traffic in terms of *(a)* passenger numbers and *(b)* car journeys from Gatwick airport his Department estimates will result from the Millennium site at Greenwich once it is opened; [40190]

(3) what increase in rail and road traffic in terms of *(a)* passenger numbers and *(b)* car journeys from Waterloo station his Department estimates will result from the construction of the Millennium site at Greenwich. [40191]

Mr. Bowis: The Department of Transport does not have this information. Forecasts of construction and visitor traffic levels for the exhibition are being prepared by consultants on behalf of the Millennium Commission.

Disabled People

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve transport facilities for the disabled. [39964]

Mr. Bowis: The transport provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act will enable us to make regulations to require new buses, trains and taxis to be fully accessible to disabled people, including wheelchair users. Discussions on the shape of those regulations are already underway with the transport industries and the disabled persons transport advisory committee. Full public consultation will also take place.

The Department's mobility unit has recently published its annual overview which sets out in more detail the work which is going on in this area. As in previous years copies have been sent to hon. Members.

School Buses

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he plans to take to ensure that school buses are clearly recognisable. [39962]

Mr. Bowis: School buses are already required by the road vehicles lighting regulations to display a "school bus" sign on journeys to and from school. The Department has no evidence to suggest that these measures are not effective.

London Commuter Services

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by how much investment in London commuter services is planned to increase over the next year. [39966]

Mr. Bowis: I cannot anticipate the outcome of this year's Budget, which will be a factor in determining the funds available for investment by public sector operators, including London Transport. Substantial investment is planned by private companies now running trains in the former Network SouthEast area: Prism intends to replace two thirds of the London, Tilbury and Southend rolling stock by 1999; South Eastern plans to spend £400 million on a modern fleet for its Kent services, London and South Coast plans a major refurbishment of its rolling stock and the newly-franchised Chiltern line has already placed an order for new rolling stock.

Motor Vehicles

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current number of licensed motor vehicles on the roads; and what was the number in 1986. [39961]

Mr. Bowis: The information is as follows:

	Thousands	
	1986	*1995*
Cars	7,388	21,395
Taxis[1]	26	33
Motor cycles	1,176	702
Three wheelers	60	31
Light goods	1,670	1,949
Goods	634	556
and coaches	149	153
Agricultural vehicles[2]	340	282
Other vehicles[3]	256	268
Total	21,699	25,369

[1] These include mainly custom-built "black cab" design vehicles.
[2] Includes various types of harvesters, work trucks and mowing machines etc.
[3] Examples include ambulances, hire engines, road rollers, road construction vehicles, street cleaning.

Rail Safety

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much Government money is allocated to improving safety on the rail network over the planning period. [39965]

Mr. Watts: Since April 1994, Government support for the railway takes the form of grants paid by the Franchising Director. These grants enable the railway operators to meet their expenditure requirements, including those with safety benefits. Safety expenditure by the railway has not been separately identified since 1992–93, because the finance and resources to manage safety have been fully integrated with other management decisions and most investment includes a safety element.

Rail Privatisation (York)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the date of privatisation of all the York-based British Rail businesses which have been privatised to date, the number of employees in the business at the time of privatisation and the amount of money received for the business; and if he will specify which further York-based British Rail businesses are in the programme for privatisation, the number of employees in each of these businesses, the expected date for disposal and the expected cash receipt from the disposal. [40241]

Mr. Watts: The following British Rail businesses, whose headquarters were based in York, have been sold or franchised as at 1 October 1996.

Business sold or franchised	*Date sale completed or franchise awarded*	*Gross proceeds (£ million)*	*Employees in whole business at date of sale/franchise award*
Civil Engineering Design Group York	15 September 1995	3	159
Eastern Track Renewals Company Ltd.	15 March 1996	11	604
InterCity East Coast Franchise	28 March 1996	[1]—	2,900
Northern Infrastructure Maintenance Company Ltd.	18 June 1996	9	520

[1] Franchises are awarded as contracts to run passenger train services in return for the payment of support, where necessary, and may not generate receipts. Support for the InterCity east coast franchise will reduce to nil by the final year of the seven-year franchise period.

The Franchising Director aims to award the Regional Railways North East franchise in spring 1997. The number of staff was 2,981 at 31 March 1996.

Leicester A46–A47 Link

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which office of his Department will analyse the additional evidence on induced traffic for the Leicester A46–A47 link from Leicestershire county council. [40127]

Mr. Watts: Additional information received from Leicestershire county council in relation to induced traffic on the proposed Leicester A46–A47 link, will be evaluated initially by officials, acting on my behalf, in the local authority orders section, Newcastle upon Tyne. They have in turn sought expert advice, from within the Department, as required.

Train Operators

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been paid to each train operator by the franchising director in order to allow them to meet supplementary access charges. [39934]

Mr. Watts: Supplementary access charges determined by the Rail Regulator and payable by train operators to Railtrack in 1995–96 and 1996–97 are detailed in the table. The Franchising Director has effectively funded all these either through support to passenger rail services paid to British Rail or to franchisees. Where the supplements were known before the final bids they are a component of the franchise payment. Where the supplements were not known they are paid as a pass-through supplement in addition to the franchise payment.

Track access charge supplements

£000

	Track possessions Schedule 4		*Railtrack performance regime Schedule 8*		*Level Crossings*
	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1996–97*
Anglia Railways Train Services Ltd.	200	344	1,203	1,240	995
Cardiff Railway Company Ltd.	60	103	357	368	127
Central Trains Ltd.	575	989	6,342	6,538	2,946
Cross Country Trains Ltd.	468	805	4,916	5,068	1,434
Gatwick Express Ltd.	35	60	832	858	73
Great Eastern Railway Ltd.	292	501	3,232	3,332	1,452
Great Western Trains Company Ltd.	493	846	5,835	6,016	1,168
InterCity East Coast Ltd.	712	1,224	7,032	7,250	1,788
InterCity West Coast Ltd.	673	1,157	5,710	5,887	640
Island Line Ltd.	0	0	0	0	0
LTS Rail Limited	0	0	1,648	1,699	766
Merseyrail Electrics Ltd.	130	223	1,615	1,665	310
Midland Main Line Ltd.	152	261	1,270	1,309	981
Network SouthCentral Ltd.	488	839	3,908	4,029	1,031
North London Railways Ltd.	221	379	1,586	1,635	370
North West Regional Railways Ltd.	554	952	3,421	3,527	1,315
Regional Railways North East Ltd.	774	1,330	4,648	4,792	5,035
ScotRail Railways Ltd.	859	1,477	4,222	4,353	1,064
South Wales and West Railway Ltd.	299	513	1,737	1,791	771
South West Trains Ltd.	601	1,033	4,460	4,598	1,421
Thames Trains Ltd.	171	294	1,054	1,087	479
Thameslink Rail Ltd.	179	307	1,669	1,721	915
The Chiltern Railway Co. Ltd.	74	127	433	446	465
The South Eastern Train Co. Ltd.	614	1,055	5,385	5,552	1,288
West Anglia Great Northern Railways Ltd.	376	645	2,488	2,565	1,471
Total	9,000	15,465	75,000	77,326	28,307

M66

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list when each contract for the M66 Denton to Middleton motorway *(a)* was and *(b)* is expected to be let, the cost of each contract, when each contract is planned to be completed, when the completed road will open and what steps he is taking to ensure contract does not delay the opening of the road. [40372]

Mr. Watts: The M66 Manchester outer ring road scheme is split into four main contracts. There was also an advance work contract to construct a rail bridge.

Contract 1 is a three year contract which was let in March 1996. The tender sum was £101,878,528. The contract is currently expected to be finished by its target completion date of spring 1999.

Contract 2 is a two-year contract which was let in August 1994. The tender sum was £48,930,425. Problems have occurred during construction which have resulted in delays. Completion is now anticipated late in 1997.

Contract 3 tenders have not yet been invited for this two year contract. The tender estimate is £80,000,000. The timing of this contract is under consideration but the aim, subject to availability of funds, is to have the whole scheme completed in 1999.

Contract 4 was a two year contract let in May 1993. The tender sum was £18,229,262. It was completed in February 1996 and is now open to traffic.

The advance works contract was for a rail bridge. It was let in March 1993. The tender sum was £2,044,174 and the contract was completed autumn 1994.

BREL (Asbestos-related Disease)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many former employees of British Rail Engineering Ltd., York carriageworks, have submitted claims for compensation for contracting an asbestos-related disease; and, of these, how many have *(a)* died and *(b)* had their claims settled; what is the average length of time these claims have taken to settle; and what action British Rail is taking to speed up the settlement of such claims. [40234]

Mr. Watts: Forty-seven former employees submitted claims and 27 have been settled. Information on the number of people who have died since submitting claims is not available, as some may have died after their claims were settled. The average time to settle claims is 2.1 years. The time taken to settle claims is, to a large extent, beyond the control of Railway Claims Ltd. as claims can be processed only when all the relevant information is received from the claimant's solicitor.

Railtrack (Oasis Concert)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will instruct the health and safety inspectorate to investigate the safety implications of Railtrack's decision in respect of the running of trains through Stevenage station during the weekend of the Oasis concert at Knebworth; and if he will make a statement. [40349]

Mr. Watts: The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate is already investigating incidents which occurred at Stevenage railway station on 10 and 11 August 1996. The investigation will consider, among other issues, whether there have been any breaches of relevant legislation.

Office of Passenger Rail Franchising

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by how much the grant to the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising has changed since the figure published in the Government's expenditure plans for transport in March 1996. [39933]

Mr. Watts: Parliament voted the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising £1,651,588k in the supply estimates for class V, vote 7 passenger rail services which is the figure set out in table 1 of the transport report. Any changes in funding will be through the normal parliamentary supply procedures.

Road and Rail Freight

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies his Department has undertaken to estimate the comparative environmental cost of transporting freight by *(a)* road and *(b)* rail. [39950]

Mr. Watts: As part of the Government's commitment to ensuring that transport users pay their full costs, the Department is at the forefront of research trying to place monetary values on the environmental impact of transport. The economics of environmental valuation is still in its infancy and the complexities involved mean that it is not yet possible to derive robust values. However, the Department does take into account the environmental impacts of policies and projects. The Department makes use of freight facilities grants and track access grants to encourage the transport of freight by rail rather than road, which amongst other things recognises the environmental benefits of rail versus road in particular circumstances.

European Airlines

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he collects regarding European airlines with special reference to the percentage share of slots each airline has at its principal base or hub. [40155]

Mr. Bowis: None. This is a matter for the slot co-ordinator at each of the airports concerned.

Driving Test

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what steps his Department is taking to ensure that theory test venues are within a readily accessible distance from driving test centres; [40262]

(2) what criteria his Department uses to determine whether a driving test centre has its own theory test venue. [40263]

Mr. Bowis: Theory test centres have been located balancing costs, travelling distances for candidates and the frequency of test sessions.

Tests are available:

within five miles in districts (usually town or cities) with a population density of greater than equal to 1,250 persons per square kilometre;

within 40 miles in sparsely populated districts with a population density of less than 100 persons per square kilometre;

within 20 miles in other districts where the population density lies between these limits.

While it is desirable that theory test centres are readily accessible by public transport, the quality of test routes is important for driving test centres. Therefore, we have no policy of co-locating theory test centres with driving test centres, although population centres often have both.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations his Department has received concerning the establishment of a venue in Huddersfield for the theory test element of the driving test. [40201]

Mr. Bowis: We have received two letters on this issue, one from my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) and one from a member of the public.

Airports (Baggage Screening)

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of aircraft passengers' hold baggage is not screened by security at *(a)* Gatwick airport, *(b)* Heathrow airport and *(c)* Stansted airport. [39932]

Mr. Bowis : None.

Oil Pollution(Braer Incident)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the implications for environmental protection policy for coastal waters of the decision of the Court of Session, announced on 16 September, on compensation claims made by Shetland islanders for oil pollution contamination arising from the Braer tanker accident of January 1993. [40393]

Mr Bowis: No decision was announced by the Court of Session on 16 September in relation to compensation claims arising out of the Braer incident.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what environmental benefits he expects to accrue from the coming into force of Statutory Instrument No. 1946, the Harbour Works (Assessment of Environmental Effects) (Amendment) Regulations 1996. [40476]

Mr. Bowis: These regulations simply clarify the existing procedures following discussions with the European Commission.

Drink Driving

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in how many fatal motor accidents in each of the last three years the driver responsible has been found to have between 50mg and 80mg of alcohol in his blood. [40297]

Mr. Bowis: The numbers of vehicle drivers and riders killed, and found to have from 50mg to 80mg of alcohol in their blood are as follows for the three most recent years for which statistics are available: 32 in 1992, 23 in 1993 and 25 in 1994.

Statistics for blood alcohol levels are available only for fatal casualties and hence no data is available for fatal accidents in which the driver or rider was not killed. No information is available relating to whether the deceased driver was responsible for the accident.

Vehicle Tax Evasion

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many cases of vehicle tax evasion were detected in the last three years; and how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions resulted. [40295]

Mr. Bowis: The number of vehicle excise duty offence reports received by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in the last three years was 5.2 million. These led to 657,000 evaders being successfully prosecuted, with a further 753,000 paying penalties out of court. Many of the remaining reports were duplication for the same vehicle. In other cases, it turned out that an offence had not been committed, or that enforcement action had encouraged relicensing, making any further action unnecessary.

Cyclists (Pavements)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he intends to take to prevent adult cyclists from riding their bicycles on pavements in central London. [39957]

Mr. Bowis: It is an offence to cycle on the footway—the pavement adjacent to the carriageway—in London. As elsewhere in the country, enforcement in London is a matter for the Metropolitan police.

London Underground (Safety)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money is allocated in the current financial year to improving safety standards on the London Underground. [39960]

Mr. Bowis: Decisions on investment priorities are a matter for London Underground Ltd. It is impossible to estimate how much money is spent each year on improving safety standards because very many projects include some element of safety-related work.

London Underground (Congestion)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his plans to relieve current levels of congestion on London Underground. [39963]

Mr. Bowis: London Underground has in hand a range of measures which will help to relieve congestion, including increases in train frequencies and station improvements. Implementation of these plans is an operational matter for London Underground. Longer term improvements will come from major investments in new lines when current projects such as the Jubilee line extension and the Heathrow progress are completed.

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many women from ethnic minorities are employed by his Department and its agencies; at what grade; and what measures he has taken to encourage the *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* employment and *(c)* promotion of women from ethnic minorities within his Department and its agencies. [39905]

Mr. Bowis: Two hundred and eighty, as at 8 October 1996.

The information requested by grade cannot be provided without identifying individual members of staff which would be in breach of good confidentiality procedure. Staff are recruited on the basis of ability and irrespective of sex or race. The Department advertises all internal vacancies, open competitions and promotion on an equal opportunity basis.

River Transport (London)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has received concerning public river transport on the Thames in central London as an integral part of London's existing public transport system; and what consequent action he is planning. [39677]

Mr. Bowis: I recently met the hon. Member and my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) with representatives of the group, Transport on Water.

Earlier this year, London First published "The Business Case for a Passenger Transport Service on the River Thames". Building on this report, the cross river partnership is examining the potential for a public transport service on the Thames and possible requirement for new piers. I look forward to the results of the cross river integrated public transport study in the new year.

I support the concept of passenger services on the Thames, but it is for the private sector to develop and operate these services. The Port of London Authority recently granted access to some of its piers to three companies that have expressed an interest in starting new passenger services on the Thames. This announcement is encouraging.

Drug and Alcohol Screening

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what statutory requirements exist for compulsory drug and alcohol screening for employees of transport companies; and what steps he is taking to encourage drug and alcohol screening amongst employees engaged in safety critical work. [39878]

Mr. Bowis: There is no statutory requirement for drug and alcohol screening of employees of transport companies. It is a criminal offence to drive or be in charge of a motor vehicle or work on the railways in a safety-related capacity while under the influence of drink or drugs or above the permitted alcohol limit. It is also an offence to act as a member of the crew of an aircraft, an aircraft maintenance engineer or an air traffic controller while impaired through the influence of drink or drugs.

Railway operators may also be found guilty, where an employee has misused alcohol or drugs, if they fail to exercise "due diligence", which, in the Government's view, requires them to undertake some form of screening. A railway group standard sets out the rules and procedures for the screening of safety critical staff where there is suspicion that drug or alcohol may have been a factor in an accident, near miss, or in making an employee unfit for work.

Constituency Visits

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many visits (i) he and (ii) his Ministers made to *(a)* the Newbury constituency and *(b)* other constituencies in the last 12 months. [39869]

Sir George Young: In the 12 months to July 1996, Transport Ministers have visited some 476 constituencies on official business. None of these were to Newbury.

War Memorials

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy with respect to the removal of or change of site of war memorials *(a)* throughout the country and *(b)* in the district local authority area of Stafford district council on the grounds of (i) planning and (ii) movement of traffic around the war memorial. [40007]

Mr. Bowis: The removal or change of site of war memorials is essentially a matter for the local planning authority concerned. Before reaching their decision on whether to give planning permission, they are required to consider any representations received and to consult the local traffic authority, where this is a different authority, if the removal or re-siting of a memorial is likely to have traffic implications for the area. Where a war memorial is a listed building, listed building consent would also be required from the Secretary of State for the Environment. The Secretary of State for Transport has no role to play in the process.

SCOTLAND

Multiple Births

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many sets of *(a)* twins, *(b)* triplets, *(c)* quadruplets, *(d)* quintuplets and *(e)* sextuplets were born in Scotland in each year since 1990; how many maternities there were in each year; and how many multiple births in each category were conceived as a result of (i) in vitro fertilisation, (ii) gamete intra-fallopian transfer and (iii) other forms of assisted conception. [39971]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

Type of birth	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Twins:						
2 live	711	682	790	751	762	780
1 live, 1 stillbirth	15	22	11	25	13	31
2 stillbirth	5	5	6	4	3	5
Triplets:						
3 live	14	18	15	10	16	27
2 live, 1 stillbirth	2	4	—	—	—	1
1 live, 2 stillbirth	—	2	—	—	—	1
Quadruplets:						
4 live	1	1	—	—	—	1
3 live, 1 stillbirth	—	1	—	—	1	—
Quintuplets:						
Sextuplets	—	—	—	—	—	—
Number of maternities	65,556	66,630	65,307	62,946	61,224	59,271

Information on the number of multiple births in Scotland attributed to assisted conception is not available. Some information on these matters is published in the annual reports of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, copies of which are available in the Library.

Criminal Cases

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many criminal cases were dealt with by the procurators fiscal in each of the last 10 years; how many were marked no proceedings in each of these years; and if he will make a statement. [40176]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of criminal reports received by procurators fiscal, and the number of reports marked "no proceedings", are as follows:

	Criminal reports received	*Cases marked no proceedings*
1985	339,317	65,580
1986	343,488	71,228
1987	338,739	59,019
1988	335,304	52,497
1989	358,960	45,092
1990	357,704	40,096
1991	375,298	35,434
1992	353,776	34,345
1993	283,145	41,120
1994	268,722	40,614
1995	259,680	37,553

Blind People

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce a Scottish-wide free travel concession scheme for registered blind people; and if he will make a statement. [40032]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In the light of representations made by organisations for the blind and disabled, my right hon. Friend last year sought the views of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities about the possibility of COSLA either organising a national scheme for the blind and disabled, or alternatively a scheme which was restricted in scope to blind people only. COSLA has now established a task group to investigate the practicalities and costs of introducing a national scheme for the blind in the first instance. The task group has undertaken to inform the Scottish Office of its findings and we await its conclusions.

Court Waiting Times

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average length of time in criminal cases between the charging of a suspect and the subsequent bringing of the case before *(a)* district courts, *(b)* sheriff courts and *(c)* high courts in the last year for which figures are available. [40174]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not readily available. In summary cases, the average period between the police charging a suspect and the case calling in court will depend on the time taken by the police to submit a report to the procurator fiscal, the time taken by the procurator fiscal to serve a complaint on the accused and the availability of a court diet. If the police detain the accused, he must be brought before the court on the next lawful day. If the accused is released for report, the time taken to submit the report will vary according to the complexity of the case and other factors. The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland has calculated that between 50 and 75 per cent. of such reports are submitted within 28 days. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate informs me that, between June 1995 and June 1996, the average period between receipt of a report by the procurator fiscal and service of a complaint was 5.1 weeks in the sheriff court and five weeks in the district court. In custody cases, the complaint will be served on the accused on the same day as the report is received by the procurator fiscal. The information requested is not available for solemn cases prosecuted in the sheriff or High Courts.

Procurator Fiscal Service

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total budget for procurator fiscal offices in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [40202]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Expenditure on salaries and running costs for the procurator fiscal service in each of the last 10 years was as follows:

Year	*Amount £000*
1986–87	12,589
1987–88	13,678
1988–89	14,947
1989–90	16,536

Year	Amount £000
1990–91	18,403
1991–92	20,821
1992–93	22,119
1993–94	25,138
1994–95	25,607
1995–96	27,799

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total spending on staff salaries in procurators fiscal offices in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [40175]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Total spending on staff salaries in the procurator fiscal service in each of the last 10 years was as follows:

Year	Amount £000
1986–87	9,331
1987–88	10,046
1988–89	11,202
1989–90	12,461
1990–91	14,365
1991–92	15,727
1992–93	16,888
1993–94	19,842
1994–95	20,332
1995–96	21,089

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many (i) procurators fiscal and (ii) deputy procurators fiscal have been employed in each district in each year since 1985; and if he will make a statement. [40203]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The total number of procurators fiscal, assistant procurators fiscal, senior deputes and deputes employed in each district since 1985 is as follows:

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Aberdeen	10.5	9.5	11.5	11.5	12	12	11	13	14	14	13	13
Banff	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Dingwall	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Dornoch	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Elgin	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Fort William	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Inverness	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Kirkwall	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lerwick	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Portree	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Lochmaddy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Peterhead	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Stonehaven	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Stornoway	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Tain	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
Wick	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Alloa	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1.6
Arbroath	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Cupar	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	2	2	2	1.5	1.5	2	2	2
Dundee	8	8	8	7	9	8	9	9	8	7	8	8
Dunfermline	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.6	5
Falkirk	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4.5	6	6	6	4.5
Forfar	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Kirkcaldy	4	5	5	4	4	5	3	4	6	4.5	5.8	5.8
Perth	4	4.5	4.5	5	5	5.5	4.5	5	6	5.5	5.5	4.5
Stirling	1	2.5	2.5	2.5	4	3.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	3.8	5
Duns	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Edinburgh	23	24	22	24	24	24	26	26	27	27	27.5	28.9
Haddington	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2
Jedburgh	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Linlithgow	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	5	5
Peebles	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Selkirk	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Campbeltown	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
Dumbarton	5.5	5.5	6	5	6	6	7	7	7	7	6.6	6
Dunoon	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Greenock	5	5	6	5.5	4.5	4.5	5.5	4	5	5	5	5
Kilmarnock	8	8	7	7	5	7	9	8	8	9	8.7	7
Oban	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Paisley	9	9	9	11	10	11	10.5	11.5	11.5	11.5	11.4	12.4
Rothesay	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Airdrie	6	6	6	6	7	7	8	7	7	7	7.2	6.8
Ayr	4	4	5	4	4	5	5.5	5.5	6.5	5.5	5.6	5.6
Dumfries	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	6	5	5	5
Hamilton	13	14	14	16	16	17.5	18	18	18.5	18.5	18.4	19.4
Kirkcudbright	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lanark	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Stranraer	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
Glasgow	56.5	58.5	57	59	57	60.5	62.5	58.5	63	62	62.3	61.5

There is a procurator fiscal for each of the districts listed. However in Dornoch, Kirkwall, Tain, Duns, Peebles, Rothesay, Lochmaddy and Kirkcudbright the procurator fiscal also has responsibility for a neighbouring district.

Small Claims Procedure

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will increase the maximum sum in respect of which claims can be taken to the sheriff court under the small claims procedure to bring it into line with English practice; and if he will make a statement. [40235]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Fixing the small claims limit in Scotland is a matter for the Lord Advocate. Although the Lord Advocate has no plans at present to increase the small claims limit, he does keep the matter under review constantly.

TREASURY

Ecological Sustainability

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will request from his officials a paper setting out the implications for the Treasury of a long-term shift in Government policy towards greater prominence to ecological sustainability. [40060]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Government are already fully committed to achieving sustainable development. This means ensuring that policy decisions take appropriate account of the environment alongside economic and other considerations. Our 1994 sustainable development strategy assessed the many challenges facing the UK over the next 20 years if we are to achieve that goal. Progress to date is reported in the annual Environment White Papers, which are available in the House of Commons Library.

Climate Change

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what mechanisms and procedures he has set up within the Treasury to assess the implications of the Department of the Environment's review of the potential effects of climate change in the United Kingdom. [40069]

Mr. Oppenheim: The degree of future climate change that is now inevitable will have implications for a broad range of policies across government. My officials are fully involved in inter-departmental discussions on climate change.

Abortions

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown by gestation according to technique of the number of abortions performed in the NHS South Thames region in the latest year for which figures are available. [40093]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Abortion data by technique are not available.

Multiple Births

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many sets of *(a)* twins, *(b)* triplets, *(c)* quadruplets, *(d)* quintuplets and *(e)* sextuplets were born in England and Wales in each year since 1990; how many maternities there were in each year; and how many multiple births in each category were conceived as a result of (i) in vitro fertilisation, (ii) gamete intra-fallopian transfer and (iii) other forms of assisted conception. [39969]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information on multiple maternities and all maternities is given in the table.

Number of maternities in England and Wales

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Twins	7,934	8,160	8,314	8,302	8,451	8,749
Triplets	201	208	202	234	260	282
Quadruplets	10	10	8	12	8	7
Quintuplets	—	2	1	—	—	—
Sextuplets	—	—	—	1	—	—
Total number of maternities with multiple births	8,145	8,380	8,525	8,549	8,719	9,038
All maternities	701,030	693,857	683,854	668,511	659,545	642,404

The Office for National Statistics does not collect information about assisted conceptions when births are registered. Some information about multiple births following these treatments is contained in annual reports made by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority to the Secretary of State for Health, copies of which are in the Library.

Paymaster Agency

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the privatisation of the Paymaster agency on the Treasury's access to information needed to monitor and control public expenditure; and if he will make a statement. [39909]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Paymaster General announced on 15 July, *Official Report*, column *372*, that he had accepted the recommendations of the recently concluded prior options review of Paymaster, and the agency would be privatised. A copy of the report is in the Library. It concluded that, to retain control over public expenditure and information on Exchequer balances, such work should continue to be carried out within the public sector.

Statistics

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the monthly figures for *(a)* M4, *(b)* M3, *(c)* inflation, *(d)* growth and *(e)* interest rates for the period 1979 to 1995. [39907]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The data requested are published in the relevant tables in "Financial Statistics and Economic Trends" for the latest data, and in the "Economic Trends Annual Supplement" for historical data. M3 data are not available after July 1989, and monthly M4 data are not available before 1982. All these publications are available from the House Library.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish for each month in the last three years *(a)* the rate of inflation and *(b)* the increase in the money supply for the month two years previously. [40218]

Mrs. Knight: The data requested are published in table 3.1 of "Economic Trends" and table 3.1D of "Financial Statistics", both of which are available in the House Library.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 11 July, *Official Report*, columns *299–300*, how many claims for unemployment benefit there have been in total; and how many people have made one or more new claims for unemployment benefit at each employment service jobcentre in the country since April 1992. [40271]

Mrs. Angela Knight: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Earnings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on inflation curbs of the trends in earnings of *(a)* blue collar and *(b)* white collar workers. [40212]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Statistical data do not generally refer to employment as either blue or white collar work. Instead, this distinction is usually made with reference to manual or non-manual work. Data from the 1996 "New Earnings Survey" is given below for manual and non-manual workers. This survey covers a random 1 per cent. of all employees and, because of its sample size, is the most reliable official source of detailed information on earnings.

1995–96	*Earnings growth*	*Percentage of all employees*
Manual	4.2	35.1
Non-Manual	4.2	64.9

If we make the stylised assumption that employment costs comprise two thirds of final output costs, this suggests that growth in manual workers' earnings contributed approximately one percentage point to retail costs, while earnings growth of non-manual workers contributed about 1.8 percentage points.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of changes in the real earnings of blue collar workers since 1979 on the competitive position of UK manufacturers in home and overseas markets. [40214]

Mrs. Knight: Since 1979, strong productivity performance and affordable real wage growth have helped enhance the competitive position of UK manufacturers. Relative unit labour costs in the UK manufacturing sector improved by around 10 per cent. between 1979 and 1995.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the real terms change in the earnings of *(a)* postal workers and *(b)* white collar workers since 1979. [40213]

Mrs. Knight: Average gross earnings for postal workers and non-manual workers are shown in tables 1 and X3 of the "New Earnings Survey Report" each April from 1979 to date. Prior to 1984, male and female earnings were shown separately in tables 8 and 9. This report is available in the House of Commons Library. Real terms changes can be calculated using the retail prices index for April of each year.

Public Bodies

Mr. Miller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what restrictions exist in relation to non-departmental public bodies in terms of their approach to *(a)* the allocation of budgets within each organisation as a result of the implementation of local pay delegation and *(b)* the effect of any additional external finance derived by each organisation both in terms of supplementing existing internal budgets and in terms of any future overall budget allocation. [40134]

Mr. Waldegrave: The delegation of pay and grading to Departments on 1 April 1996 applied to home civil servants outside the senior civil service. It did not directly affect non-departmental public bodies, which do not generally employ civil servants, nor did it change the administrative arrangements affecting NDPBs. Where additional external receipts are generated by an NDPB, the use of such receipts will usually be governed by an appropriate provision in the body's financial memorandum. If no such provision exists, a proposal to finance extra expenditure by the body without any offset to the grant in aid would be subject to the approval of the sponsor Department and the Treasury. Special arrangements exist for dealing with the proceeds from the disposal of Exchequer financed assets by NDPBs. The details are set out in paragraph 39 of dear accounting officer letter 3/89, a copy of which is being placed in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if salary commitments entered into by non-departmental public bodies operating within their budget allocations require Treasury approval. [40135]

Mr. Waldegrave: Many, but not all, non-departmental public bodies have a statutory framework which requires the Treasury to consent to or approve the pay and conditions of staff or board members.

Value Added Tax (Hot Water)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money will be collected annually in respect of recent legislation applying VAT to hot water supplied to *(a)* hospitals, *(b)* universities, *(c)* hospices and *(d)* colleges. [40115]

Mr. Oppenheim: The point of this legislation was not to collect money, but to nip a tax avoidance scheme in the bud. Hospitals and universities are funded on the assumption that they incur VAT on fuel and power, but in fact some of these bodies have been among those who benefited from this avoidance scheme. The cost of the scheme, across all sectors and if left unchecked, could have reached £170 million or so. This figure represents tax at risk not tax raised.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on recent legislation applying VAT to hot water supplied to hospitals, universities, hospices and colleges. [40116]

Mr. Oppenheim: The VAT (Anti-avoidance)(Heating) Order—SI 1996, No. 1661—excludes heating water from the zero rate in group 2 schedule 8 of the VAT Act 1994. This ended a VAT avoidance scheme by which some organisations, otherwise unable to recover VAT, had been able to avoid VAT on fuel and power by exploiting the zero rate for supplies of water. Hospitals and universities are funded on the assumption that they incur VAT on fuel and power, but in fact some of these bodies have been among those who benefited from the scheme.

The effect of the order is to ensure the correct VAT treatment of fuel and power. It taxes heated water because it is, in reality, either a means of distributing heat or is supplied for use as hot water, the value of which lies in the fact that it has been heated.

It is expected that the artificial schemes will now collapse and users will revert to the normal practice of purchasing zero-rated cold water, and when heating it will use tax-paid fuel.

Inflation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current rate of inflation; and what was the forecast of inflation for July 1996 made by the Governor of the Bank of England *(a)* one and *(b)* two years ago. [40217]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The current rate of inflation of the retail prices index excluding mortgage interest payments—RPI ex MIPs—was 2.8 per cent. for the year to August 1996. The Bank of England publishes quarterly, not monthly, forecasts of RPI ex MIPs, but does not publish RPI all items forecasts. The Bank of England's forecast of RPI ex MIPs inflation for Q3 1996, made in August 1995, was 3.7 per cent. The Bank of England did not make forecasts two years ahead in August 1994.

National Debt

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of servicing the national debt in each of the next five years. [40211]

Mrs. Angela Knight: In the 1995 "Financial Statement and Budget Report", central Government gross debt interest payments were forecast as follows:

1996–97: £26.5 billion

1997–98: £28.0 billion

1998–99: £27.9 billion

1999–2000[1]: £28 billion

2000–2001[1]: £27 billion

[1]As in the Red Book, these forecasts are rounded to the nearest £ billion.

In the 1996 "Summer Economic Forecast", central Government gross debt interest payments for 1996–97 and 1997–98 were revised to £26.7 billion and £29.4 billion respectively.

Food Retail Employees

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total number of people, using full-time equivalents, employed in the food retail sector in the years *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1975, *(c)* 1980, *(d)* 1985, *(e)* 1990, *(f)* 1995 and *(g)* 1996; for each year what was the proportion of people working in companies employing (1) one to 10, (2) 11 to 24, (3) 25 to 49, (4) 50 to 99, (5) 100 to 199, (6) 200 to 499 and (7) 500 and above; and if he will make a statement. [40130]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Information on a full-time equivalent basis cannot be provided for all years. The tables provide total employees for each year and full-time/part-time where available. The earliest available information comparable with later years is at 1971.

Information on workplace size is available from the census of employment and can be accessed through the NOMIS database by the House of Commons Library.

Employees in Great Britain: at June (thousands)[1]
Standard industrial classification 1980—retail distribution of food

	Men[2]	Women		Total
		Full-time	Part-time	
1971	229	171	174	574
1975	217	153	219	588
1980	216	155	225	596

[1] Unadjusted.
[2] Full-time/part-time split for men not available.

Standard industrial classification 1992—retail trade in non-specialised stores selling mainly food, drink and tobacco and retail sale of food in specialised stores

	Men			Women		Total
	All	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	
1980	245[1]	—	—	171	240	656
1985	237[1]	—	—	140	254	630
1990	—	180	82	145	335	743
1995	—	160	120	118	418	817
1996	—	165	128	120	429	842

[1] Full-time/part-time split for men not available.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people there were *(a)* in employment and *(b)* self-employed in each parliamentary constituency in the United Kingdom at the latest date for which figures are available. [40237]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Information on total employment and the self-employed by local authority district at spring 1996 is available from the labour force survey. Information on employees in employment by parliamentary constituency at September 1993 is available from the census of employment. Both series can be accessed through the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library.

Inward Investment

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a sectoral breakdown of inward investment to Britain from *(a)* the US and *(b)* Japan. [40289]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The latest available information relates to direct investment by US and Japanese businesses in Britain in 1994. This is contained in table 2.7 of "Business Monitor MA4 (1994 Overseas Direct Investment)" published by the Central Statistical Office. A copy is in the House of Commons Library.

Debt Reduction

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the debt reduction initiative proposed by the World bank. [40337]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Government have been pressing hard for a resolution to the debt problems of the poorest, most indebted countries. We therefore very much welcome the successful launch of the heavily indebted poor country initiative, which is based on UK proposals. We fully support its objective of ensuring that, having demonstrated a track record of sustained strong economic policy performance, these countries are able to achieve overall external debt sustainability. The Government welcome the participation in the initiative of all major creditors—the International Monetary Fund, the World bank, and the Paris club of official bilateral creditors—which have agreed to act in a co-ordinated manner, sharing the costs of the initiative equitably. We also welcome the decision to implement the initiative flexibly, on a case by case basis, and with full participation by debtor Governments. Implementation for the first potentially eligible countries is expected to begin before the end of the year.

Prostate Cancer

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have died in each year of the last 10 years from prostate cancer. [40471]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The number of deaths from prostate cancer—ICD[1] 185—in England and Wales was published in "Mortality Statistics: Cause", series DH2 No. 13, 1986; No. 14, 1987; No. 15, 1988; No. 16, 1989; No. 17, 1990; No. 18, 1991; No. 19, 1992; No. 21, 1993–94; in "Office for National Statistics, Monitor" DH2 96/2–1995. Copies of these publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

[1]International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision.

Fuel Duty Rebate

Sir Peter Fry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase fuel duty rebate for scheduled coach services to bring it into line with passenger rail services. [39889]

Mr. Bowis: I have been asked to reply.

None.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Child Care Facilities

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to encourage the provision of child care facilities in the workplace. [39997]

Mrs. Gillan: Employers can claim a deduction for all expenditure on child care provision for employees when calculating their business profits for tax purposes. Since April 1990 employees have been exempt from paying income tax on the benefit in kind of workplace nurseries provided by their employer.

On 28 August I published a consultation paper, "Work and Family: Ideas and Options for Child care", which seeks views on how policy might develop to encourage the development of good-quality child care, including by employers.

Skill Shortages

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the major areas of employment where there will be skill shortage in the remainder of the 1990s; and what assessment she has made of the impact these shortages will have on manufacturing industry. [39995]

Mr. Paice: The Department commissions an annual survey of employers assessing the extent of hard-to-fill vacancies currently and in 12 months' time. Rapidly changing technology, international competition and customer needs mean skills shortages cannot be predicted too far ahead. It is for local training and enterprise councils to monitor labour market needs in their own areas. Government programmes such as training for work, national traineeships and modern apprenticeships provide the basis of provision for the identified needs.

Unemployment

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement about the current level of unemployment in the north-west region. [39998]

Mr. Paice: Unadjusted unemployment in the north-west standard region fell by over 15,000 in the 12 months to August, from 256,550—9 per cent.—in August 1995 to 241,219—8.5 per cent.—in August 1996, the last month for which figures are available.

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many women from ethnic minorities are employed by her Department and its agencies; at what grade; and what measures she has taken to encourage the *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* employment and *(c)* promotion of women from ethnic minorities within her Department and its agencies [39903]

Mrs. Gillan: The following table shows the number of women from ethnic minorities who are employed by the Department for Education and Employment and its agencies, broken down by grade.

Women of ethnic minority origin employed by the DfEE, ES and TPA at 1 July 1996

	Black	*Asian*	*Other*	*Total*
AA	93	84	6	183
AO	645	793	74	1,512
EO	169	207	31	407
HEO	15	16	10	41
SEO	1	4	0	5
G7	0	0	1	1
Total	923	1,104	122	2,149

DFEE and its agencies are committed to equal opportunities and, have established a number of initiatives to encourage the recruitment, employment and promotion both of ethnic minority staff and of women. For example:

Advertising of external posts is targeted and the Department's equal opportunity committments appear in advertisements.

Most departmental vacancies are filled from within. The internal vacancy bulletin explains the Department's comittment to equal opportunity and that applicants are considered on merit regardless of age, disability, gender, race religion, marital status or sexual orientation.

The gender and ethnic origin of all applicants are monitored during the recruitment process to ensure that advertising is effective and the recruitment procedure fair.

Recruitment is based on competence rather than on subjective criteria.

The Employment Service has a mentoring programme for staff of ethnic minority origin and DFEE is setting up a similar scheme.

DFEE is a member of the National Mentoring Consortium and the Windsor Fellowship, providing support for ethnic minority undergraduates with the aim of encouraging them to consider a civil service career.

DFEE has a development programme for staff from ethnic minorities of AA grade and above, called "Equal Chance" to help develop the skills and competences required for career progression within the Department.

The Department has a commitment to flexible working including part-time, job sharing and remote working and is taking measures to encourage and extend opportunities for working this way.

The Department has participated in double disadvantage focus groups as part of a Cabinet Office study to consider the double disadvantage which might be experienced by women of ethnic minority origin.

It is of concern to the Department that staff of ethnic minority origin remain under-represented at senior levels. The Department's equal opportunities strategy has key priorities for action. These include ensuring that people from ethnic minority backgrounds have the same opportunities as everyone else to develop and progress and looking at strategies to enable women to progress on merit to senior posts. A research project has been mounted to identify barriers to progress for all ethnic minority staff. The findings from this research will inform future initiatives.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to receive

the 1996–97 corporate plan of the office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools. [39922]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. That said, I understand that the corporate plan was published on Friday 27 September 1996, and a copy has been placed in the Library.

Older Workers

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the proportion of the population aged 55 years and over which will remain economically active during the next 10 years; and what plans she has to combat discrimination by employers on the ground of age. [39996]

Mrs. Gillan: Labour force projections of economic activity, broken down by age, were published in the May 1996 edition of "Labour Market Trends", which is available in the Library.

Government policy is to continue to tackle age discrimination in employment through this Department's campaign for older workers. The campaign aims to persuade employers of the business benefits in recruiting, retraining and retaining workers on merit; raise awareness of the importance of older workers to the economy; and encourage older workers to remain active in the labour market.

The campaign's message, that age has no bearing on the ability to do a good job, is being carried forward and disseminated through a series of booklets—publications have been issued for employers, older workers themselves, recruitment agencies and the recruitment advertising industry—and regional ministerial presentations.

The campaign is currently being evaluated and the results should be available next spring.

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on the employment of older workers. [40288]

Mrs. Gillan: The Government's policy is to persuade employers to recruit, train and retain workers on merit, regardless of age. This is promoted through this Department's campaign for older workers.

Primary School Pupils

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the number and percentage of pupils in maintained primary school classes of 31 or more in each year from 1991 and what figures are available for 1996 showing the percentage change between 1995 and 1996 *(a)* by each local education authority in England, *(b)* by region and *(c)* in total. [40148]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information is shown in the following tables:

Numbers and percentages of pupils in classes of 31 or more in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area and region in England: 1991–96 (provisional)

Position in January each year

	1991	
LEA	*Number*	*Percentage*[1]
Corporation of London	0	0.0
Camden	220	2.8
Greenwich	1,216	7.2
Hackney	341	3.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	354	5.2
Islington	315	2.8
Kensington and Chelsea	187	4.0
Lambeth	368	2.4
Lewisham	698	4.2
Southwark	1,389	8.7
Tower Hamlets	487	4.2
Wandsworth	373	2.9
Westminster	218	3.5
Barking	1,136	8.5
Barnet	1,711	8.9
Bexley	4,361	26.4
Brent	1,544	8.8
Bromley	6,133	32.3
Croydon	2,875	13.3
Ealing	3,277	15.3
Enfield	4,652	25.9
Haringey	528	3.3
Harrow	4,320	28.7
Havering	3,423	19.1
Hillingdon	4,072	24.3
Hounslow	5,024	33.5
Kingston upon Thames	3,439	42.4
Merton	1,540	14.7
Newham	2,263	11.4
Redbridge	8,333	56.4
Richmond upon Thames	1,798	20.3
Sutton	3,731	35.3
Waltham Forest	3,283	20.3
Birmingham	26,754	28.3
Coventry	5,454	21.3
Dudley	6,732	29.8
Sandwell	8,800	34.4
Solihull	4,998	29.3
Walsall	3,713	18.2
Wolverhampton	3,565	17.9
Knowsley	3,593	22.9
Liverpool	8,471	18.5
St. Helens	4,836	32.4
Sefton	7,831	33.1
Wirral	2,295	8.8
Bolton	8,594	40.3
Bury	4,941	34.7
Manchester	9,484	23.6
Oldham	8,187	41.2
Rochdale	6,889	39.0
Salford	4,210	20.0
Stockport	6,573	28.6
Tameside	8,128	41.9
Trafford	7,430	43.4
Wigan	10,066	40.4
Barnsley	3,266	16.9
Doncaster	4,509	17.8
Rotherham	2,334	10.4
Sheffield	6,647	17.3
Bradford	3,383	11.4
Calderdale	5,103	31.0
Kirklees	7,897	26.6
Leeds	10,247	24.1
Wakefield	8,058	32.9
Gateshead	1,311	8.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	5,040	27.1
North Tyneside	1,527	10.8
South Tyneside	1,906	13.8

Numbers and percentages of pupils in classes of 31 or more in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area and region in England: 1991–96 (provisional)

Position in January each year

LEA	1991 Number	1991 Percentage[1]
Sunderland	4,716	17.9
Isles of Scilly	0	0.0
Avon	21,212	30.0
Bedfordshire	9,406	27.9
Berkshire	16,930	32.2
Buckinghamshire	17,251	31.8
Cambridgeshire	13,596	26.3
Cheshire	35,447	43.6
Cleveland	12,897	23.6
Cornwall	11,984	32.4
Cumbria	6,895	18.7
Derbyshire	20,325	28.3
Devon	19,509	27.0
Dorset	13,959	37.8
Durham	12,995	26.3
East Sussex	14,944	33.5
Essex	29,219	25.4
Gloucestershire	8,424	21.9
Hampshire	39,623	33.5
Hereford and Worcester	9,988	22.5
Hertfordshire	17,022	24.1
Humberside	16,528	22.8
Isle of Wight	1,637	25.0
Kent	41,865	36.1
Lancashire	45,822	40.7
Leicestershire	16,990	24.2
Lincolnshire	13,517	29.7
Norfolk	11,081	19.6
North Yorkshire	11,975	23.0
Northamptonshire	9,408	21.6
Northumberland	7,600	41.2
Nottinghamshire	13,213	17.0
Oxfordshire	6,433	18.0
Shropshire	6,630	21.2
Somerset	9,813	31.1
Staffordshire	18,648	23.1
Suffolk	5,245	13.6
Surrey	12,605	18.9
Warwickshire	10,801	28.4
West Sussex	10,088	21.5
Wiltshire	8,596	21.3
By region		
North	54,887	22.1
North-west	182,797	33.9
East Anglia	29,922	20.4
Yorkshire and Humberside	79,947	21.4
West Midlands	106,083	25.3
East Midlands	73,453	23.8
Greater London	73,609	16.2
Other South-east	217,023	28.5
South-west	93,497	28.6
England	911,218	25.5

(1) Pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more expressed as a percentage of all pupils in single teacher classes.

Note:

The comparable percentage of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more in 1979 was 35.3.

Position in January each year

LEA	1992 Number	1992 Percentage[1]
Corporation of London	0	0.0
Camden	541	6.5
Greenwich	1,305	7.8
Hackney	219	1.9
Hammersmith and Fulham	649	9.4
Islington	756	6.6
Kensington and Chelsea	130	2.7
Lambeth	630	4.0
Lewisham	2,017	11.4
Southwark	1,403	8.4
Tower Hamlets	596	4.9
Wandsworth	818	6.1
Westminster	292	4.3
Barking	1,531	11.1
Barnet	1,986	10.1
Bexley	5,021	29.8
Brent	1,450	8.3
Bromley	6,417	33.1
Croydon	3,553	16.4
Ealing	3,370	15.3
Enfield	5,185	27.5
Haringey	481	2.9
Harrow	4,140	27.1
Havering	2,585	14.5
Hillingdon	4,745	27.8
Hounslow	5,434	35.3
Kingston upon Thames	4,705	54.1
Merton	1,882	16.3
Newham	1,294	6.3
Redbridge	8,476	56.6
Richmond upon Thames	1,353	14.8
Sutton	3,540	33.3
Waltham Forest	2,958	18.0
Birmingham	23,741	24.9
Coventry	5,758	22.3
Dudley	4,447	21.2
Sandwell	8,571	33.3
Solihull	5,077	29.8
Walsall	4,313	20.7
Wolverhampton	2,765	13.8
Knowsley	4,107	26.1
Liverpool	10,605	22.9
St. Helens	5,100	34.4
Sefton	8,027	32.9
Wirral	3,314	12.2
Bolton	8,269	38.2
Bury	5,313	35.6
Manchester	8,361	20.9
Oldham	7,938	40.6
Rochdale	8,371	37.0
Salford	4,938	23.4
Stockport	6,735	28.6
Tameside	8,067	40.0
Trafford	8,329	47.6
Wigan	8,684	34.9
Barnsley	3,482	17.8
Doncaster	6,457	24.8
Rotherham	2,970	13.4
Sheffield	5,909	15.1
Bradford	3,579	12.3
Calderdale	3,914	23.3
Kirklees	7,433	25.2
Leeds	11,617	26.8
Wakefield	8,322	33.4
Gateshead	1,094	6.8
Newcastle upon Tyne	5,240	26.7
North Tyneside	2,928	20.2
South Tyneside	2,139	15.2
Sunderland	4,376	16.9
Isles of Scilly	31	18.8
Avon	20,297	28.4

Position in January each year

LEA	1992 Number	1992 Percentage[1]
Bedfordshire	7,467	21.8
Berkshire	14,091	26.4
Buckinghamshire	17,304	30.9
Cambridgeshire	13,893	26.4
Cheshire	31,286	38.4
Cleveland	13,234	23.5
Cornwall	13,502	36.2
Cumbria	7,894	21.5
Derbyshire	24,579	34.0
Devon	20,230	27.8
Dorset	14,553	38.2
Durham	11,967	23.9
East Sussex	16,382	36.5
Essex	27,674	23.9
Gloucestershire	8,883	22.4
Hampshire	35,143	29.5
Hereford and Worcester	8,437	18.7
Hertfordshire	18,517	25.7
Humberside	16,604	22.8
Isle of Wight	1,477	21.9
Kent	36,948	31.5
Lancashire	44,711	39.8
Leicestershire	14,056	19.9
Lincolnshire	10,999	24.1
Norfolk	10,271	18.0
North Yorkshire	11,246	21.3
Northamptonshire	8,648	19.5
Northumberland	6,710	35.9
Nottinghamshire	15,656	19.9
Oxfordshire	5,302	14.7
Shropshire	5,809	18.2
Somerset	9,655	30.1
Staffordshire	20,825	25.2
Suffolk	4,878	12.6
Surrey	13,108	19.5
Warwickshire	12,822	32.8
West Sussex	11,563	23.7
Wiltshire	8,398	20.5
By region		
North	55,582	22.1
North-west	180,155	33.2
East Anglia	29,042	19.6
Yorkshire and Humberside	81,533	21.7
West Midlands	102,565	24.2
East Midlands	73,938	23.7
Greater London	79,462	17.1
Other South-east	204,976	26.6
South-west	95,549	28.7
England	902,802	24.9

[1] Change in number of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more between 1995 and 1996 expressed as a percentage of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more in 1995.

Note:

The comparable percentage of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more in 1979 was 35.3.

Position in January each year

LEA	1993 Number	1993 Percentage[1]
Corporation of London	0	0.0
Camden	452	5.4
Greenwich	1,837	10.8
Hackney	656	5.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	719	10.0
Islington	673	5.5
Kensington and Chelsea	159	3.3
Lambeth	762	4.8
Lewisham	1,706	9.8
Southwark	1,894	10.8
Tower Hamlets	619	4.6
Wandsworth	1,572	11.1
Westminster	391	6.1
Barking	1,021	7.3
Barnet	2,028	10.1
Bexley	5,450	30.9
Brent	2,145	11.7
Bromley	7,461	37.8
Croydon	4,022	17.4
Ealing	4,261	19.2
Enfield	6,081	31.6
Haringey	631	3..8
Harrow	3,740	24.2
Havering	3,881	21.1
Hillingdon	4,942	28.7
Hounslow	4,528	29.4
Kingston upon Thames	5,203	55.9
Merton	2,499	21.1
Newham	1,872	8.8
Redbridge	8,754	55.1
Richmond upon Thames	1,617	16.7
Sutton	4,566	40.5
Waltham Forest	3,766	22.3
Birmingham	26,985	28.0
Coventry	5,446	22.0
Dudley	4,751	21.4
Sandwell	9,243	34.8
Solihull	5,399	31.1
Walsall	5,997	27.5
Wolverhampton	4,731	22.1
Knowsley	5,013	30.7
Liverpool	11,104	23.7
St. Helens	4,305	29.2
Sefton	7,984	33.2
Wirral	4,726	16.9
Bolton	8,684	40.0
Bury	5,458	37.1
Manchester	10,107	24.6
Oldham	8,673	41.6
Rochdale	8,651	47.2
Salford	5,623	25.6
Stockport	7,624	31.7
Tameside	9,739	47.4
Trafford	8,618	49.1
Wigan	9,018	36.2
Barnsley	4,094	20.7
Doncaster	6,006	22.8
Rotherham	2,198	10.0
Sheffield	7,855	21.1
Bradford	5,943	19.2
Calderdale	4,672	26.7
Kirklees	7,804	26.5
Leeds	15,309	28.2
Wakefield	8,536	33.6
Gateshead	1,986	12.3
Newcastle upon Tyne	5,927	29.6
North Tyneside	2,962	20.2
South Tyneside	3,023	21.0
Sunderland	3,878	15.0
Isles of Scilly	0	0.0
Avon	22,884	31.0
Bedfordshire	8,541	24.0
Berkshire	14,671	27.0
Buckinghamshire	17,283	30.6
Cambridgeshire	13,912	26.2
Cheshire	30,297	36.9
Cleveland	13,649	23.7
Cornwall	13,492	35.7
Cumbria	9,232	24.2
Derbyshire	27,385	36.8

LEA	Position in January each year 1993 Number	Percentage[1]
Devon	20,804	27.5
Dorset	16,522	41.5
Durham	14,038	27.8
East Sussex	16,939	37.3
Essex	28,575	24.5
Gloucestershire	9,272	22.6
Hampshire	35,902	29.6
Hereford and Worcester	8,887	19.6
Hertfordshire	18,667	25.2
Humberside	20,519	27.4
Isle of Wight	1,856	26.9
Kent	38,705	32.0
Lancashire	43,818	38.2
Leicestershire	15,963	22.3
Lincolnshire	11,649	25.1
Norfolk	11,083	19.1
North Yorkshire	12,118	22.4
Northamptonshire	8,419	18.7
Northumberland	6,461	34.2
Nottinghamshire	18,878	23.6
Oxfordshire	5,494	15.1
Shropshire	7,164	21.9
Somerset	10,336	31.4
Staffordshire	30,794	35.7
Suffolk	5,046	12.6
Surrey	15,438	22.0
Warwickshire	13,002	31.9
West Sussex	9,108	18.6
Wiltshire	11,151	24.9
By region		
North	61,156	23.9
North-west	189,442	34.3
East Anglia	30,041	19.9
Yorkshire and Humberside	95,054	24.2
West Midlands	122,399	28.1
East Midlands	82,294	25.9
Greater London	89,908	18.7
Other South-east	211,179	26.8
South-west	104,461	30.2
England	985,934	26.5

[1] Pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more expressed as a percentage of all pupils in single teacher classes.

Note:

The comparable percentage of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more in 1979 was 35.3.

LEA	Position in January each year 1994 Number	Percentage[1]
Corporation of London	0	0.0
Camden	542	6.1
Greenwich	2,301	13.3
Hackney	499	3.7
Hammersmith and Fulham	795	11.1
Islington	892	6.9
Kensington and Chelsea	454	9.0
Lambeth	816	5.2
Lewisham	1,318	7.2
Southwark	2,331	12.3
Tower Hamlets	638	4.9
Wandsworth	1,666	11.8
Westminster	428	5.9
Barking	1,415	9.9
Barnet	2,434	11.6
Bexley	5,910	32.0
Brent	2,157	11.4
Bromley	10,385	47.5
Croydon	4,896	20.5
Ealing	4,146	20.3
Enfield	7,237	35.4
Haringey	732	4.3
Harrow	3,544	22.6
Havering	4,176	22.1
Hillingdon	4,896	27.5
Hounslow	5,319	33.5
Kingston upon Thames	5,484	57.9
Merton	3,114	25.3
Newham	1,317	6.0
Redbridge	8,456	52.8
Richmond upon Thames	1,134	11.4
Sutton	4,696	40.1
Waltham Forest	3,200	18.4
Birmingham	27,164	28.4
Coventry	5,541	21.9
Dudley	7,497	31.1
Sandwell	10,175	37.5
Solihull	6,711	36.9
Walsall	5,577	25.1
Wolverhampton	5,155	24.1
Knowsley	5,915	34.8
Liverpool	12,620	26.6
St. Helens	5,437	37.5
Sefton	8,258	33.7
Wirral	5,928	20.4
Bolton	9,046	41.0
Bury	6,239	40.0
Manchester	9,619	23.4
Oldham	8,617	41.1
Rochdale	8,020	43.8
Salford	6,817	30.6
Stockport	8,179	33.8
Tameside	12,079	56.4
Trafford	9,151	49.6
Wigan	9,997	38.2
Barnsley	5,656	28.3
Doncaster	7,548	28.4
Rotherham	2,569	11.5
Sheffield	8,281	21.9
Bradford	8,781	27.3
Calderdale	5,268	30.1
Kirklees	9,372	29.9
Leeds	19,405	32.7
Wakefield	9,996	37.0
Gateshead	1,862	11.2
Newcastle upon Tyne	5,843	28.5
North Tyneside	3,905	26.0
South Tyneside	3,456	23.9
Sunderland	4,244	16.2
Isles of Scilly	31	18.5
Avon	26,753	35.5
Bedfordshire	9,064	24.4
Berkshire	16,290	28.9
Buckinghamshire	19,072	33.3
Cambridgeshire	15,079	27.2
Cheshire	30,193	36.2
Cleveland	13,386	23.2
Cornwall	13,441	35.1
Cumbria	9,385	24.2
Derbyshire	29,982	39.9
Devon	21,175	27.3
Dorset	18,142	44.0
Durham	15,012	28.9
East Sussex	18,297	40.7
Essex	30,729	25.8
Gloucestershire	11,123	26.5
Hampshire	44,304	34.2
Hereford and Worcester	9,910	21.1
Hertfordshire	21,344	27.7
Humberside	25,914	33.4

LEA	Position in January each year 1994 Number	Percentage[1]
Isle of Wight	1,862	26.6
Kent	41,570	33.6
Lancashire	45,112	38.5
Leicestershire	14,433	20.2
Lincolnshire	12,642	26.6
Norfolk	11,175	19.5
North Yorkshire	13,702	24.8
Northamptonshire	9,590	20.6
Northumberland	7,901	41.4
Nottinghamshire	19,947	24.2
Oxfordshire	5,850	15.3
Shropshire	9,085	27.2
Somerset	10,476	30.1
Staffordshire	30,738	35.3
Suffolk	5,608	13.8
Surrey	13,741	20.2
Warwickshire	12,740	30.6
West Sussex	10,934	21.6
Wiltshire	12,185	26.5
By region		
North	64,994	25.0
North-west	201,227	35.7
East Anglia	31,862	20.8
Yorkshire and Humberside	116,492	28.6
West Midlands	130,293	29.4
East Midlands	86,594	26.8
Greater London	97,328	19.6
Other South-east	234,057	28.8
South-west	113,326	31.9
England	1,076,173	28.2

[1] Change in number of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more between 1995 and 1996 expressed as a percentage of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more in 1995.

Note:

The comparable percentage of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more in 1979 was 35.3.

LEA	Position in January each year 1995 Number	Percentage[1]
Corporation of London	0	0.0
Camden	605	6.7
Greenwich	2,555	14.5
Hackney	569	4.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,294	16.6
Islington	1,055	8.1
Kensington and Chelsea	221	4.5
Lambeth	540	3.4
Lewisham	1,192	6.4
Southwark	2,483	12.7
Tower Hamlets	778	5.1
Wandsworth	1,459	10.3
Westminster	646	9.4
Barking	1,317	8.7
Barnet	2,291	10.9
Bexley	7,834	39.2
Brent	2,444	13.0
Bromley	11,596	51.8
Croydon	5,973	23.7
Ealing	4,137	19.2
Enfield	8,192	39.7
Haringey	1,045	6.0
Harrow	4,152	25.5
Havering	4,662	24.1
Hillingdon	4,833	26.4
Hounslow	5,691	34.1
Kingston upon Thames	6,216	64.0
Merton	3,299	26.2
Newham	2,680	11.3
Redbridge	8,337	51.5
Richmond upon Thames	2,040	20.4
Sutton	4,328	35.7
Waltham Forest	3,330	18.8
Birmingham	28,251	29.2
Coventry	7,875	29.4
Dudley	6,935	28.5
Sandwell	10,815	39.1
Solihull	7,506	40.3
Walsall	6,428	27.9
Wolverhampton	5,846	26.8
Knowsley	6,300	34.7
Liverpool	12,541	27.0
St. Helens	5,507	37.4
Sefton	8,793	35.1
Wirral	6,076	20.7
Bolton	10,366	45.9
Bury	6,434	41.1
Manchester	10,211	24.2
Oldham	8,823	41.0
Rochdale	8,102	41.8
Salford	6,975	30.8
Stockport	7,858	31.8
Tameside	11,291	51.8
Trafford	9,689	51.1
Wigan	11,375	42.7
Barnsley	6,201	30.9
Doncaster	8,338	31.7
Rotherham	3,269	14.4
Sheffield	11,119	28.3
Bradford	10,707	32.4
Calderdale	5,666	30.9
Kirklees	12,290	38.2
Leeds	21,245	35.1
Wakefield	10,544	37.8
Gateshead	2,237	13.2
Newcastle upon Tyne	6,744	33.1
North Tyneside	4,930	32.7
South Tyneside	3,616	24.7
Sunderland	3,601	13.5
Isles of Scilly	0	0.0
Avon	26,919	34.5
Bedfordshire	10,328	26.7
Berkshire	15,605	26.8
Buckinghamshire	21,248	35.6
Cambridgeshire	14,946	26.8
Cheshire	30,315	35.5
Cleveland	13,859	23.7
Cornwall	14,004	35.6
Cumbria	11,452	29.0
Derbyshire	32,959	42.7
Devon	23,659	29.8
Dorset	18,038	42.8
Durham	15,455	29.5
East Sussex	19,691	40.8
Essex	31,875	25.8
Gloucestershire	11,595	26.7
Hampshire	43,976	33.9
Hereford and Worcester	10,533	21.8
Hertfordshire	23,054	29.0
Humberside	26,842	33.8
Isle of Wight	1,860	26.4
Kent	44,208	34.4
Lancashire	48,832	40.4
Leicestershire	17,567	23.6
Lincolnshire	14,632	29.8
Norfolk	12,066	20.5
North Yorkshire	17,758	31.3
Northamptonshire	10,576	21.9

Position in January each year

LEA	1995 Number	1995 Percentage[1]
Northumberland	8,030	41.8
Nottinghamshire	23,142	27.8
Oxfordshire	6,422	16.4
Shropshire	9,972	29.0
Somerset	10,776	30.1
Staffordshire	31,147	35.3
Suffolk	6,396	15.1
Surrey	12,118	17.7
Warwickshire	13,980	32.9
West Sussex	12,879	24.2
Wiltshire	14,703	31.0
By region		
North	69,924	26.6
North-west	209,488	36.4
East Anglia	33,408	21.3
Yorkshire and Humberside	133,979	32.2
West Midlands	139,288	30.8
East Midlands	98,876	29.8
Greater London	107,794	21.1
Other South-east	243,264	29.2
South-west	119,694	32.7
England	1,155,715	29.6

[1] Change in number of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more between 1995 and 1996 expressed as a percentage of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more in 1995.

Note:

The comparable percentage of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more in 1979 was 35.3

Position in January each year

LEA	1996 (provisional) Number	1996 (provisional) Percentage[1]
Corporation of London	0	0.0
Camden	447	5.2
Greenwich	1,412	8.0
Hackney	664	4.9
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,036	13.2
Islington	982	7.4
Kensington and Chelsea	187	3.8
Lambeth	857	5.5
Lewisham	917	5.2
Southwark	2,051	10.7
Tower Hamlets	859	5.8
Wandsworth	2,373	16.5
Westminster	544	7.9
Barking	1,603	10.6
Barnet	1,848	8.8
Bexley	8,821	42.7
Brent	2,259	12.0
Bromley	11,850	50.6
Croydon	6,341	24.4
Ealing	5,508	24.5
Enfield	8,840	41.0
Haringey	984	5.9
Harrow	3,833	24.3
Havering	5,678	28.7
Hillingdon	4,820	25.8
Hounslow	5,674	34.4
Kingston upon Thames	7,095	70.1
Merton	3,955	30.9
Newham	2,381	9.8
Redbridge	9,060	52.7
Richmond upon Thames	2,309	22.3
Sutton	4,235	32.8
Waltham Forest	3,282	18.4
Birmingham	25,642	26.3
Coventry	7,638	28.3
Dudley	6,618	26.9

Position in January each year

LEA	1996 (provisional) Number	1996 (provisional) Percentage[1]
Sandwell	11,812	41.5
Solihull	8,403	44.0
Walsall	7,241	31.1
Wolverhampton	6,762	30.9
Knowsley	5,254	29.2
Liverpool	12,051	26.0
St. Helens	5,583	37.7
Sefton	10,670	42.5
Wirral	6,987	23.7
Bolton	11,719	49.7
Bury	6,968	43.4
Manchester	9,687	22.8
Oldham	9,434	43.5
Rochdale	8,316	43.0
Salford	6,997	30.6
Stockport	8,247	32.8
Tameside	11,508	53.0
Trafford	9,389	48.9
Wigan	11,087	42.5
Barnsley	8,677	42.3
Doncaster	9,609	35.1
Rotherham	5,732	24.6
Sheffield	11,181	28.0
Bradford	11,449	34.3
Calderdale	6,331	34.3
Kirklees	14,395	44.3
Leeds	21,455	35.3
Wakefield	10,673	37.7
Gateshead	2,443	14.4
Newcastle upon Tyne	6,792	33.1
North Tyneside	4,897	31.7
South Tyneside	4,067	27.6
Sunderland	4,148	15.1
Isles of Scilly	0	0.0
Avon	26,647	34.4
Bedfordshire	11,867	30.4
Berkshire	18,308	30.5
Buckinghamshire	22,753	37.6
Cambridgeshire	18,065	31.8
Cheshire	32,225	37.3
Cleveland	13,869	23.6
Cornwall	14,936	37.5
Cumbria	11,382	28.2
Derbyshire	41,217	52.0
Devon	28,078	34.8
Dorset	19,654	44.5
Durham	19,881	38.0
East Sussex	20,971	42.4
Essex	34,741	27.6
Gloucestershire	14,246	32.1
Hampshire	44,938	34.5
Hereford and Worcester	13,225	27.2
Hertfordshire	23,396	29.0
Humberside	27,832	35.0
Isle of Wight	2,243	31.1
Kent	44,212	33.8
Lancashire	54,099	44.5
Leicestershire	21,784	28.8
Lincolnshire	13,962	27.9
Norfolk	13,224	22.0
North Yorkshire	18,663	32.1
Northamptonshire	11,089	22.4
Northumberland	8,478	43.3
Nottinghamshire	32,931	38.9
Oxfordshire	10,608	25.7
Shropshire	13,425	38.2
Somerset	13,649	37.3
Staffordshire	32,163	35.7
Suffolk	7,940	18.2
Surrey	14,197	19.9
Warwickshire	17,566	40.7

Position in January each year

LEA	1996 (provisional) Number	Percentage[1]
West Sussex	14,447	26.7
Wiltshire	15,128	30.8
By region		
North	75,957	28.5
North-west	220,201	38.0
East Anglia	39,229	24.4
Yorkshire and Humberside	145,997	34.6
West Midlands	150,495	32.8
East Midlands	120,983	35.7
Greater London	112,705	21.8
Other South-east	262,682	30.9
South-west	132,338	35.5
England	1,260,587	31.8

[1] Change in number of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more between 1995 and 1996 expressed as a percentage of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more in 1995.

Note:

The comparable percentage of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more in 1979 was 35.3.

Position in January each year

LEA	Change Number	Percentage[1]
Corporation of London	0	0.0
Camden	–158	–26.1
Greenwich	–1,143	–44.7
Hackney	95	16.7
Hammersmith and Fulham	–258	–19.9
Islington	–73	–6.9
Kensington and Chelsea	–34	–15.4
Lambeth	317	58.7
Lewisham	–275	–23.1
Southwark	–432	–17.4
Tower Hamlets	81	10.4
Wandsworth	914	62.6
Westminster	–102	–15.8
Barking	286	21.7
Barnet	–443	–19.3
Bexley	987	12.6
Brent	–185	–7.6
Bromley	254	2.2
Croydon	368	6.2
Ealing	1,371	33.1
Enfield	648	7.9
Haringey	–61	–5.8
Harrow	–319	–7.7
Havering	1,016	21.8
Hillingdon	–13	–0.3
Hounslow	–17	–0.3
Kingston upon Thames	879	14.1
Merton	656	19.9
Newham	–299	–11.2
Redbridge	723	8.7
Richmond upon Thames	269	13.2
Sutton	–93	–2.1
Waltham Forest	–48	–1.4
Birmingham	–2,609	–9.2
Coventry	–237	–3.0
Dudley	—317	–4.6
Sandwell	997	9.2
Solihull	897	12.0
Walsall	813	12.6
Wolverhampton	916	15.7
Knowsley	–1,046	–16.6
Liverpool	–490	–3.9
St. Helens	56	1.0
Sefton	1,877	21.3
Wirral	911	15.0
Bolton	1,353	13.1

Position in January each year

LEA	Change Number	Percentage[1]
Bury	534	8.3
Manchester	–524	–5.1
Oldham	611	6.9
Rochdale	214	2.6
Salford	22	0.3
Stockport	389	5.0
Tameside	217	1.9
Trafford	–300	–3.1
Wigan	–288	–2.5
Barnsley	2,476	39.9
Doncaster	1,271	15.2
Rotherham	2,463	75.3
Sheffield	62	0.6
Bradford	742	6.9
Calderdale	665	11.7
Kirklees	2,105	17.1
Leeds	210	1.0
Wakefield	129	1.2
Gateshead	206	9.2
Newcastle upon Tyne	48	0.7
North Tyneside	–33	–0.7
South Tyneside	451	12.5
Sunderland	547	15.2
Isles of Scilly	0	0.0
Avon	–272	–1.0
Bedfordshire	1,539	14.9
Berkshire	2,704	17.3
Buckinghamshire	1,505	7.1
Cambridgeshire	3,119	20.9
Cheshire	1,910	6.3
Cleveland	10	0.1
Cornwall	832	6.7
Cumbria	–70	–0.6
Derbyshire	8,258	25.1
Devon	4,419	18.7
Dorset	1,616	9.0
Durham	4,426	28.6
East Sussex	1,280	6.5
Essex	2,866	9.0
Gloucestershire	2,651	22.9
Hampshire	962	2.2
Hereford and Worcester	2,692	25.6
Hertfordshire	342	1.5
Humberside	990	3.7
Isle of Wight	383	20.6
Kent	4	0.0
Lancashire	5,267	10.8
Leicestershire	4,217	24.0
Lincolnshire	–670	–4.6
Norfolk	1,158	9.6
North Yorkshire	905	5.1
Northamptonshire	513	4.9
Northumberland	448	5.6
Nottinghamshire	9,789	42.3
Oxfordshire	4,186	65.2
Shropshire	3,453	34.6
Somerset	2,873	26.7
Staffordshire	1,016	3.3
Suffolk	1,544	24.1
Surrey	2,079	17.2
Warwickshire	3,586	25.7
West Sussex	1,568	12.2
Wiltshire	425	2.9
By region		
North	6,033	8.6
North-west	10,713	5.1
East Anglia	5,821	17.4
Yorkshire and Humberside	12,018	9.0

Position in January each year

LEA	Change Number	Change Percentage[1]
West Midlands	11,207	8.0
East Midlands	22,107	22.4
Greater London	4,911	4.6
Other South-east	19,418	8.0
South-west	12,644	10.6
England	104,872	9.1

[1] Change in number of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more between 1995 and 1996 expressed as a percentage of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more in 1995.

Note:

The comparable percentage of pupils in single teacher classes of 31 or more in 1979 was 35.3.

Infant School Pupils

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the number and percentage of pupils aged five, six and seven years in maintained infant school classes of 31 or more in each year since 1990 with figures which are available for 1996 showing the percentage change between 1995 and 1996 *(a)* by each local education authority in England, *(b)* by region and *(c)* in total. [40149]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on the sizes of classes as taught by key stage was first collected centrally in January 1996. Provisional information for key stage 1 is shown in the following table:

Numbers and percentages of pupils at key stage 1 in one teacher classes of size 31 or more in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area and region in England: January 1996 (provisional)

	Pupils	Percentage
Corporation of London	0	0.0
Camden	127	4.0
Greenwich	470	7.5
Hackney	413	8.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	313	11.0
Islington	443	8.1
Kennington and Chelsea	62	3.5
Lambeth	381	6.7
Lewisham	567	8.6
Southwark	707	9.3
Tower Hamlets	349	6.8
Wandsworth	1,118	18.9
Westminster	224	9.1
Barking	734	12.0
Barnet	730	8.5
Bexley	3,984	45.3
Brent	786	11.0
Bromley	5,121	49.0
Croydon	3,497	31.3
Ealing	2,499	26.3
Enfield	3,621	39.2
Haringey	566	8.2
Harrow	1,929	32.4
Havering	2,439	29.2
Hillingdon	1,378	19.6
Hounslow	2,354	35.8
Kingston upon Thames	3,430	82.4
Merton	1,958	44.7
Newham	734	7.7
Redbridge	3,307	48.5
Richmond upon Thames	1,414	31.3
Sutton	1.077	23.5

Numbers and percentages of pupils at key stage 1 in one teacher classes of size 31 or more in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area and region in England: January 1996 (provisional)

	Pupils	Percentage
Waltham Forest	1,020	13.6
Birmingham	10,500	25.7
Coventry	3,510	30.9
Dudley	2,928	29.9
Sandwell	4,303	37.8
Solihull	3,917	49.7
Walsall	2,392	26.0
Wolverhampton	3,176	35.5
Knowsley	1,594	22.7
Liverpool	4,465	23.9
St. Helens	2,179	34.5
Sefton	4,540	43.6
Wirral	2,342	19.4
Bolton	4,861	51.6
Bury	2,926	45.6
Manchester	3,033	19.8
Oldham	3,488	40.5
Rochdale	3,084	39.5
Salford	2,946	32.8
Stockport	3,197	29.7
Tameside	4,316	48.3
Trafford	3,151	41.8
Wigan	4,400	40.7
Barnsley	2,278	30.0
Doncaster	3,584	31.9
Rotheham	1,438	16.8
Sheffield	3,116	19.8
Bradford	5,397	31.6
Calderdale	2,461	35.3
Kirklees	4,374	35.2
Leeds	8,677	35.0
Wakefield	2,680	26.1
Gateshead	699	10.3
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,590	30.0
North Tyneside	2,248	33.9
South Tyneside	1,314	22.7
Sunderland	1,246	11.2
Isles of Scilly	0	0.0
Avon	10,067	31.6
Bedfordshire	5,785	31.9
Berkshire	4,908	22.4
Buckinghamshire	7,269	35.8
Cambridgeshire	5,299	22.2
Cheshire	10,142	28.5
Cleveland	2,979	13.4
Cornwall	4,399	27.6
Cumbria	4,476	28.8
Derbyshire	12,144	41.1
Devon	7,589	24.2
Dorset	8,266	43.5
Durham	5,910	28.3
East Sussex	8,927	43.0
Essex	9,946	19.3
Gloucestershire	5,083	27.2
Hampshire	17,282	30.8
Hereford and Worcester	4,435	21.1
Hertfordshire	8,404	26.0
Humberside	8,874	28.7
Isle of Wight	904	23.8
Kent	14,765	26.7
Lancashire	20,425	40.4
Leicestershire	6,071	20.2
Lincolnshire	4,092	20.2
Norfolk	4,096	19.1
North Yorkshire	4,613	20.1
Northamptonshire	4,780	21.0
Northumberland	4,013	40.9
Nottinghamshire	6,397	21.0
Oxfordshire	2,333	14.4

Numbers and percentages of pupils at key stage 1 in one teacher classes of size 31 or more in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area and region in England: January 1996 (provisional)

	Pupils	Percentage
Shropshire	3,638	27.6
Somserset	4,239	26.5
Staffordshire	12,408	33.2
Suffolk	3,009	15.6
Surrey	6,848	22.6
Warwickshire	7,062	42.9
West Sussex	3,963	19.2
Wiltshire	4,037	20.3
By region		
North	25,475	23.7
North-west	81,089	34.5
East Anglia	12,404	19.2
Yorkshire and Humberside	47,492	28.2
West Midlands	58,269	31.1
East Midlands	33,484	25.1
Greater London	47,752	23.3
Other South-east	91,334	26.3
South-west	43,680	28.6
England	440,979	27.5

[1] Number of key stage 1 pupils being taught in single teacher classes of 31 or more expressed as a percentage of all key stage 1 pupils in single teacher classes.

Physical Education

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the effect of the measures contained in the Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Act 1996 on the provision of PE facilities. [37940]

Mrs. Gillan: The Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Act 1996 has no effect on the premises requirements for maintained schools or for other institutions offering nursery education. The Act allows grant-maintained schools to borrow commercially, which will allow such schools to invest more in their facilities for physical education.

The Education (School Premises) Regulation 1996 recently revised many of the premises requirements for maintained schools. The requirements for PE facilities were, however, unaffected.

Sheltered Workshops

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the number of blind and disabled people and the number of able-bodied people employed in each sheltered workshop in Scotland indicating the cost of each category in each workshop; and if she will make a statement. [40034]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. David Marshall, dated 14 October 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of people employed in Supported Workshops in Scotland. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Information on the number of people in Scottish workshops supported by the Employment Service (ES) under its Supported Employment Programme is provided at Annex 1. The Programme is provided under contracts between the workshop owners (who are local authorities or voluntary bodies) and the ES and covers placements with employers as well as workshop places.

Information on the costs of workshop employees in the requested categories (blind people, other disabilities and non-disabled people) is not available. It is not required for management purposes by the ES; no figures are therefore obtained or kept.

Information on the per capita costs of disabled employees supported by the ES is gathered by the ES from voluntary body and local authority contractors as it is a requirement for funding. Contractors provide this information to the ES on a confidential basis as it is commercially sensitive and so individual workshop figures are not publicly available from the ES. However the average cost per disabled employee in Scottish workshops, in 1994/95, the latest year for which figures are available, was £10,695. In that year costs ranged from a loss of £18,783 per worker in one workshop to a loss of £4,421 per worker in another.

I hope this is helpful.

ANNEX 1

Name of workshop	*Location*	*Number disabled workers supported by ES[1] including blind*	*Number blind workers[2] supported by ES[1]*	*Number non disabled workers not supported by ES[1]*	*Number other disabled workers not supported by ES[1]*
Beltane	Wishaw	19	1	4	0
Blindcraft	Edinburgh	73	45	41	0
Dovetail Enterprises	Dundee	70	28	48	0
Matrix, Fife	Dalgety Bay	47	8	6	0
Blindcraft	Glasgow	118	82	72	7
The Sign Factory	Falkirk	38	6	5	0
Camphill	Newton Dec	82	0	30	0
Erskine Hospital Workshops	Bishopton	32	1	27	3
Hansel Village	Symington	30	0	11	0
Haven Products[3]	Glasgow	90	3	81	6
Lady Haig	Edinburgh	27	3	10	0
Lord Roberts	Edinburgh	8	0	5	0
New Trinity Industries	Edinburgh	53	1	20	0
Blindcraft	Inverness	21	2	7	0
Glencraft Group (Blindcraft Aberdeen)	Aberdeen	71	25	36	0
Scottish Braille Press	Edinburgh	26	7	7	1
Totals		805	212	410	17

[1] Employment Service.
[2] Includes partially sighted workers.
[3] Haven Products operates from four separate sites but has been counted as one workshop unit in the table above.

Schools (Staff Misconduct)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) on how many occasions and on what dates since 1982 the proprietor of Bedales junior school has notified her Department of cases of dismissal of or resignation by members of staff on the grounds of misconduct as required under the Education (Particulars of Independent Schools) Regulations of 1982, 1991 and 1994; [40414]

(2) how many proprietors of independent schools have reported cases of dismissal of or resignations by members of staff on the grounds of misconduct as required under the Education (Particulars of Independent Schools) Regulations of 1982, 1991 and 1994; and if she will list the schools and the dates of each report. [40415]

Mrs. Gillan: The Department's record are not kept in a form which would provide this information.

Nursery Vouchers

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) Office for Standards in Education how many inspections of providers under phase 1 of the nursery voucher scheme took place in September; [40391]

(2) what estimate she has made of how long it will take to complete Ofsted inspection of all the participating providers the Government predict will take part in phase 2 of the nursery voucher scheme at the current rate of inspection; [40387]

(3) how many Ofsted inspections of providers under phase 1 of the nursery voucher scheme Ofsted plans to undertake *(a)* between October and the end of December and *(b)* between the end of December and the end of March 1997; [40382]

(4) What estimate she has made of how many providers will require follow-up inspection based on completed Ofsted inspections of providers under phase 1 of the nursery voucher scheme and what is the planned timetable for follow-up inspections; [40392]

(5) how many Ofsted inspectors have been trained to carry out inspection of providers under phase 1 of the nursery voucher scheme; and how many of these were previously primary inspectors; [40384]

(6) what are the minimum qualifications required for Ofsted inspectors of providers under the nursery voucher scheme; and what training is given to qualify Ofsted inspectors to undertake inspection of providers under the nursery voucher scheme. [40388]

Mr. Robin Squire: These are matters for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

City and Guilds Courses

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what course replaced City and Guilds course 7790 in media techniques after its equivalent status was withdraw in December 1995. [40413]

Mr. Paice: A number of national vocational qualifications in the same occupational area as City and Guilds 7790 in media techniques (journalism and radio) have been accredited by NCVQ. The NVQ titles are broadcast journalism; newspaper journalism (graphics journalism); newspaper journalism (production journalism); newspaper journalism (writing); periodical journalism (subbing); periodical journalism (writing); periodical production; advertisement production. These NVQs are the approved outcomes for trainees now entering youth programmes and training for work following the change of status of City and Guilds 7790 on 31 December 1995.

Assisted Places

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the *(a)* actual spending and *(b)* budgeted provision on the assisted places scheme in the academic year 1995–96; how many schools participated; how many assisted places were available; how many were taken up; and what percentage of the pupils in the schools involved were on assisted places. [40544]

Mrs. Gillan: Expenditure information is not available on an academic year basis. In the last financial year 1995–96, actual spending on the assisted places scheme in England was £104.762 million. Provision in the original Supply estimates was £104.413 million. There were 293 participating schools offering 33,906 assisted places, fo which 29,917 were taken up. Just over 14 per cent. of all pupils in the participating schools held assisted places in academic year 1995–96.

GCSE Scores

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average GCSE point score, where A*=7, for English language and mathematics for *(a)* girls and *(b)* boys in the maintained sector in (i) 1994, (ii) 1995 and (iii) 1996. [40546]

Mr. Paice: The average GCSE point scores for English and mathematics in the maintained sector in England where A*=7 are as follows:

	1994		*1995*	
	Girls	*Boys*	*Girls*	*Boys*
English	4.4	3.7	4.4	3.6
Mathematics	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.4

The figures for 1996 are not yet available.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what percentage of total school leavers in the maintained sector failed to attain five GCSEs at grades A to C in 1996 *(a)* in total and *(b)* broken down according to gender. [40547]

Mr. Paice: This information is not available.

School Ballots

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* schools, *(b)* primary schools and *(c)* secondary schools there were in 1995–96 in England and Wales and in each country; how many schools (i) held ballots to decide whether or not to opt out of local education authority control and (ii) decided to opt out of local education authority control in 1995–96; and if she will calculate (i) and (ii) as a percentage of *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)* for each country and for England and Wales. [40592]

Mr. Forth: Information on the number of primary and secondary schools in England and the proportion whose governing bodies have given parents an opportunity to vote in a ballot on grant-maintained status is given in the following table.

Education in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Total number of schools and number of parental ballots between 1 September 1995 and 31 August 1996

LEA area	*(a) All schools*				
	Total number of schools	*Total ballots held*	*Ballot percentage*	*Yes ballot results*	*Yes ballot percentage*
Barking and Dagenham	61	0	0.0	0	0.0
Barnet	99	2	2.0	1	1.0
Barnsley	104	0	0.0	0	0.0
Bath and NE Somerset	80	0	0.0	0	0.0
Bedfordshire	273	4	1.5	1	0.4
Berkshire	312	4	1.3	3	1.0
Bexley	72	0	0.0	0	0.0
Birmingham	391	1	0.3	0	0.0
Bolton	117	0	0.0	0	0.0
Bradford	234	0	0.0	0	0.0
Brent	57	0	0.0	0	0.0
Bromley	75	3	4.0	2	2.7
Buckinghamshire	310	2	0.6	2	0.6
Bury	83	0	0.0	0	0.0
Calderdale	91	1	1.1	1	1.1
Cambridge	286	3	1.0	2	0.7
Camden	51	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cheshire	491	1	0.2	0	0.0
City of Bristol	154	0	0.0	0	0.0
City of Kingston upon Hull	96	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cornwall	277	1	0.4	1	0.4
Corporation of London	1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Coventry	108	0	0.0	0	0.0
Croydon	106	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cumbria	301	0	0.0	0	0.0
Derbyshire	481	2	0.4	0	0.0
Devon	494	2	0.4	0	0.0
Doncaster	139	0	0.0	0	0.0
Dorset	240	4	1.7	3	1.3
Dudley	98	0	0.0	0	0.0
Durham	334	1	0.3	0	0.0
Ealing	69	0	0.0	0	0.0
East Riding of Yorkshire	149	1	0.7	0	0.0
East Sussex	253	2	0.8	0	0.0
Enfield	77	0	0.0	0	0.0
Essex	536	5	0.9	4	0.7
Gateshead	93	0	0.0	0	0.0
Gloucestershire	249	1	0.4	0	0.0
Greenwich	88	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hackney	67	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	44	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hampshire	629	0	0.0	0	0.0
Haringey	85	1	1.2	0	0.0
Harrow	63	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hartlepool	36	0	0.0	0	0.0
Havering	85	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hereford and Worcester	352	3	0.9	3	0.9
Hertfordshire	477	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hillingdon	63	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hounslow	76	0	0.0	0	0.0
Isle of Wight	67	0	0.0	0	0.0
Isles of Scilly	5	1	20.0	0	0.0

Total number of schools and number of parental ballots between 1 September 1995 and 31 August 1996

LEA area	*(a) All schools*				
	Total number of schools	*Total ballots held*	*Ballot percentage*	*Yes ballot results*	*Yes ballot percentage*
Islington	65	0	0.0	0	0.0
Kensington and Chelsea	27	0	0.0	0	0.0
Kent	597	2	0.3	1	0.2
Kingston upon Thames	41	1	2.4	1	2.4
Kirklees	186	0	0.0	0	0.0
Knowsley	73	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lambeth	72	1	1.4	0	0.0
Lancashire	690	6	0.9	1	0.1
Leeds	289	0	0.0	0	0.0
Leicestershire	407	4	1.0	3	0.7
Lewisham	82	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lincolnshire	296	1	0.3	1	0.3
Liverpool	201	1	0.5	1	0.5
Manchester	195	1	0.5	0	0.0
Merton	59	0	0.0	0	0.0
Middlesbrough	60	0	0.0	0	0.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	100	0	0.0	0	0.0
Newham	77	0	0.0	0	0.0
Norfolk	412	1	0.2	1	0.2
North East Lincolnshire	77	0	0.0	0	0.0
North Lincolnshire	85	0	0.0	0	0.0
North Tyneside	77	0	0.0	0	0.0
North West Somerset	79	0	0.0	0	0.0
North Yorkshire	375	2	0.5	0	0.0
Northamptonshire	308	3	1.0	2	0.6
Northumberland	204	1	0.5	1	0.5
Nottinghamshire	499	1	0.2	1	0.2
Oldham	117	0	0.0	0	0.0
Oxfordshire	282	0	0.0	0	0.0
Redbridge	68	0	0.0	0	0.0
Redcar and Cleveland	67	0	0.0	0	0.0
Richmond upon Thames	47	0	0.0	0	0.0
Rochdale	82	0	0.0	0	0.0
Rotherham	132	0	0.0	0	0.0
Salford	104	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sandwell	129	1	0.8	0	0.0
Sefton	115	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sheffield	165	2	1.2	0	0.0
Shropshire	238	0	0.0	0	0.0
Solihull	82	1	1.2	0	0.0
Somerset	259	0	0.0	0	0.0
South Gloucestershire	112	0	0.0	0	0.0
South Tyneside	69	0	0.0	0	0.0
Southwark	77	1	1.3	1	1.3
St. Helens	74	0	0.0	0	0.0
Staffordshire	485	1	0.2	1	0.2
Stockport	121	0	0.0	0	0.0
Stockton on Tees	80	0	0.0	0	0.0
Suffolk	334	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sunderland	116	0	0.0	0	0.0
Surrey	347	4	1.2	3	0.9
Sutton	46	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tameside	95	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tower Hamlets	90	1	1.1	0	0.0
Trafford	88	1	1.1	1	1.1
Wakefield	159	1	0.6	1	0.6
Walsall	113	2	1.8	2	1.8
Waltham Forest	76	1	1.3	0	0.0
Wandsworth	61	6	9.8	4	6.6
Warwickshire	259	5	1.9	4	1.5
West Sussex	287	2	0.7	0	0.0
Westminster	49	1	2.0	0	0.0
Wigan	138	0	0.0	0	0.0
Wiltshire	300	7	2.3	5	1.7
Wirral	123	0	0.0	0	0.0
Wolverhampton	112	1	0.9	0	0.0
York	74	0	0.0	0	0.0
England	20,984	108	0.5	58	0.3

The number of schools is derived from January 1996 DFEE schools census. Grant-maintained, independent and special schools are excluded from the table.

(b) Primary schools

LEA area	Number of primary schools	Total ballots held	Ballot percentage	Yes ballot results	Yes ballot percentage
Barking and Dagenham	53	0	0.0	0	0.0
Barnet	88	1	1.1	1	1.1
Barnsley	90	0	0.0	0	0.0
Bath and NE Somerset	69	0	0.0	0	0.0
Bedfordshire	214	3	1.4	1	0.5
Berkshire	266	3	1.1	2	0.8
Bexley	61	0	0.0	0	0.0
Birmingham	329	0	0.0	0	0.0
Bolton	104	0	0.0	0	0.0
Bradford	157	0	0.0	0	0.0
Brent	55	0	0.0	0	0.0
Bromley	72	1	1.4	0	0.0
Buckinghamshire	276	2	0.7	2	0.7
Bury	69	0	0.0	0	0.0
Calderdale	85	1	1.2	1	1.2
Cambridge	258	0	0.0	0	0.0
Camden	42	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cheshire	427	0	0.0	0	0.0
City of Bristol	132	0	0.0	0	0.0
City of Kingston upon Hull	80	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cornwall	246	1	0.4	1	0.4
Corporation of London	1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Coventry	89	0	0.0	0	0.0
Croydon	95	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cumbria	274	0	0.0	0	0.0
Derbyshire	437	2	0.5	0	0.0
Devon	438	0	0.0	0	0.0
Doncaster	113	0	0.0	0	0.0
Dorset	194	2	1.0	2	1.0
Dudley	82	0	0.0	0	0.0
Durham	291	0	0.0	0	0.0
Ealing	62	0	0.0	0	0.0
East Riding of Yorkshire	131	1	0.8	0	0.0
East Sussex	218	1	0.5	0	0.0
Enfield	66	0	0.0	0	0.0
Essex	502	4	0.8	3	0.6
Gateshead	80	0	0.0	0	0.0
Gloucesteshire	236	1	0.4	0	0.0
Greenwich	73	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hackney	58	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	37	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hampshire	553	0	0.0	0	0.0
Haringey	76	0	0.0	0	0.0
Harrow	54	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hartlepool	30	0	0.0	0	0.0
Havering	71	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hereford and Worcester	282	3	1.1	3	1.1
Hertfordshire	416	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hillingdon	60	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hounslow	64	0	0.0	0	0.0
Isle of Wight	46	0	0.0	0	0.0
Isles of Scilly	4	0	0.0	0	0.0
Islington	56	0	0.0	0	0.0
Kensington and Chelsea	24	0	0.0	0	0.0
Kent	538	1	0.2	1	0.2
Kingston upon Thames	35	0	0.0	0	0.0
Kirklees	156	0	0.0	0	0.0
Knowsley	63	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lambeth	68	1	1.5	0	0.0
Lancashire	592	3	0.5	1	0.2
Leeds	244	0	0.0	0	0.0
Leicestershire	333	1	0.3	1	0.3
Lewisham	69	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lincolnshire	260	1	0.4	1	0.4
Liverpool	171	0	0.0	0	0.0
Manchester	167	0	0.0	0	0.0
Merton	49	0	0.0	0	0.0
Middlesbrough	49	0	0.0	0	0.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	79	0	0.0	0	0.0
Newham	64	0	0.0	0	0.0
Norfolk	373	1	0.3	1	0.3

LEA area	(b) Primary schools				
	Number of primary schools	Total ballots held	Ballot percentage	Yes ballot results	Yes ballot percentage
North East Lincolnshire	65	0	0.0	0	0.0
North Lincolnshire	71	0	0.0	0	0.0
North Tyneside	67	0	0.0	0	0.0
North West Somerset	57	0	0.0	0	0.0
North Yorkshire	328	1	0.3	0	0.0
Northamptonshire	257	3	1.2	2	0.8
Northumberland	144	1	0.7	1	0.7
Nottinghamshire	422	0	0.0	0	0.0
Oldham	102	0	0.0	0	0.0
Oxfordshire	238	0	0.0	0	0.0
Redbridge	54	0	0.0	0	0.0
Redcar and Cleveland	54	0	0.0	0	0.0
Richmond upon Thames	39	0	0.0	0	0.0
Rochdale	70	0	0.0	0	0.0
Rotherham	115	0	0.0	0	0.0
Salford	87	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sandwell	111	1	0.9	0	0.0
Sefton	93	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sheffield	140	2	1.4	0	0.0
Shropshire	209	0	0.0	0	0.0
Solihull	69	1	1.4	0	0.0
Somerset	222	0	0.0	0	0.0
South Gloucestershire	98	0	0.0	0	0.0
South Tyneside	58	0	0.0	0	0.0
Southwark	68	1	1.5	1	1.5
St. Helens	62	0	0.0	0	0.0
Staffordshire	405	1	0.2	1	0.2
Stockport	107	0	0.0	0	0.0
Stockton on Tees	66	0	0.0	0	0.0
Suffolk	256	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sunderland	99	0	0.0	0	0.0
Surrey	312	3	1.0	3	1.0
Sutton	40	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tameside	80	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tower Hamlets	76	0	0.0	0	0.0
Trafford	77	0	0.0	0	0.0
Wakefield	130	0	0.0	0	0.0
Walsall	100	2	2.0	2	2.0
Waltham Forest	62	1	1.6	0	0.0
Wandsworth	58	6	10.3	4	6.9
Warwickshire	230	5	2.2	4	1.7
West Sussex	246	1	0.4	0	0.0
Westminster	41	1	2.4	0	0.0
Wigan	117	0	0.0	0	0.0
Wiltshire	273	6	2.2	4	1.5
Wirral	104	0	0.0	0	0.0
Wolverhampton	95	0	0.0	0	0.0
York	62	0	0.0	0	0.0
England	18,032	70	0.4	43	0.2

The number of schools is derived from January 1996 DFEE schools census. Grant-maintained, independent and special schools are excluded from the table.

LEA area	(c) Secondary schools				
	Number of secondary schools	Total ballots held	Ballot percentage	Yes ballot results	Yes ballot percentage
Barking and Dagenham	8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Barnet	11	1	9.1	0	0.0
Barnsley	14	0	0.0	0	0.0
Bath and NE Somerset	11	0	0.0	0	0.0
Bedfordshire	59	1	1.7	0	0.0
Berkshire	46	1	2.2	1	2.2
Bexley	11	0	0.0	0	0.0
Birmingham	62	1	1.6	0	0.0
Bolton	13	0	0.0	0	0.0
Bradford	77	0	0.0	0	0.0
Brent	2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Bromley	3	2	66.7	2	66.7
Buckinghamshire	34	0	0.0	0	0.0

LEA area	(c) Secondary schools				
	Number of secondary schools	Total ballots held	Ballot percentage	Yes ballot results	Yes ballot percentage
Bury	14	0	0.0	0	0.0
Calderdale	6	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cambridge	28	3	10.7	2	7.1
Camden	9	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cheshire	64	1	1.6	0	0.0
City of Bristol	22	0	0.0	0	0.0
City of Kingston upon Hull	16	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cornwall	31	0	0.0	0	0.0
Corporation of London	0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Coventry	19	0	0.0	0	0.0
Croydon	11	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cumbria	27	0	0.0	0	0.0
Derbyshire	44	0	0.0	0	0.0
Devon	56	2	3.6	0	0.0
Doncaster	26	0	0.0	0	0.0
Dorset	46	2	4.3	1	2.2
Dudley	16	0	0.0	0	0.0
Durham	43	1	2.3	0	0.0
Ealing	7	0	0.0	0	0.0
East Riding of Yorkshire	18	0	0.0	0	0.0
East Sussex	35	1	2.9	0	0.0
Enfield	11	0	0.0	0	0.0
Essex	34	1	2.9	1	2.9
Gateshead	13	0	0.0	0	0.0
Gloucestershire	13	0	0.0	0	0.0
Greenwich	15	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hackney	9	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	7	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hampshire	76	0	0.0	0	0.0
Haringey	9	1	11.1	0	0.0
Harrow	9	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hartlepool	6	0	0.0	0	0.0
Havering	14	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hereford and Worcester	70	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hertfordshire	61	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hillingdon	3	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hounslow	12	0	0.0	0	0.0
Isle of Wight	21	0	0.0	0	0.0
Isles of Scilly	1	1	100.0	0	0.0
Islington	9	0	0.0	0	0.0
Kensington and Chelsea	3	0	0.0	0	0.0
Kent	59	1	1.7	0	0.0
Kingston upon Thames	6	1	16.7	1	16.7
Kirklees	30	0	0.0	0	0.0
Knowsley	10	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lambeth	4	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lancashire	98	3	3.1	0	0.0
Leeds	45	0	0.0	0	0.0
Leicestershire	74	3	4.1	2	2.7
Lewisham	13	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lincolnshire	36	0	0.0	0	0.0
Liverpool	30	1	3.3	1	3.3
Manchester	28	1	3.6	0	0.0
Merton	10	0	0.0	0	0.0
Middlesbrough	11	0	0.0	0	0.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	21	0	0.0	0	0.0
Newham	13	0	0.0	0	0.0
Norfolk	39	0	0.0	0	0.0
North East Lincolnshire	12	0	0.0	0	0.0
North Lincolnshire	14	0	0.0	0	0.0
North Tyneside	10	0	0.0	0	0.0
North West Somerset	22	0	0.0	0	0.0
North Yorkshire	47	1	2.1	0	0.0
Northamptonshire	51	0	0.0	0	0.0
Northumberland	60	0	0.0	0	0.0
Nottinghamshire	77	1	1.3	1	1.3
Oldham	15	0	0.0	0	0.0
Oxfordshire	44	0	0.0	0	0.0
Redbridge	14	0	0.0	0	0.0
Redcar and Cleveland	13	0	0.0	0	0.0
Richmond upon Thames	8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Rochdale	12	0	0.0	0	0.0

LEA area	(c) Secondary schools				
	Number of secondary schools	Total ballots held	Ballot percentage	Yes ballot results	Yes ballot percentage
Rotherham	17	0	0.0	0	0.0
Salford	17	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sandwell	18	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sefton	22	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sheffield	25	0	0.0	0	0.0
Shropshire	29	0	0.0	0	0.0
Solihull	13	0	0.0	0	0.0
Somerset	37	0	0.0	0	0.0
South Gloucestershire	14	0	0.0	0	0.0
South Tyneside	11	0	0.0	0	0.0
Southwark	9	0	0.0	0	0.0
St. Helens	12	0	0.0	0	0.0
Staffordshire	80	0	0.0	0	0.0
Stockport	14	0	0.0	0	0.0
Stockton on Tees	14	0	0.0	0	0.0
Suffolk	78	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sunderland	17	0	0.0	0	0.0
Surrey	35	1	2.9	0	0.0
Sutton	6	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tameside	15	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tower Hamlets	14	1	7.1	0	0.0
Trafford	11	1	9.1	1	9.1
Wakefield	29	1	3.4	1	3.4
Walsall	13	0	0.0	0	0.0
Waltham Forest	14	0	0.0	0	0.0
Wandsworth	3	0	0.0	0	0.0
Warwickshire	29	0	0.0	0	0.0
West Sussex	41	1	2.4	0	0.0
Westminster	8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Wigan	21	0	0.0	0	0.0
Wiltshire	27	1	3.7	1	3.7
Wirral	19	0	0.0	0	0.0
Wolverhampton	17	1	5.9	0	0.0
York	12	0	0.0	0	0.0
England	2,952	38	1.3	15	0.5

The number of schools is derived from January 1996 DFEE schools census. Grant-maintained, independent and special schools are excluded from the table.

School Overcrowding

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what legal safeguards exist against overcrowding in schools. [40583]

Mrs. Gillan: The legal safeguards are those set out in my reply of 19 March, *Official Report*, column *121*. Regulation 17(3) of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1996 requires that every part of a school building shall be such that the health, safety and welfare of occupants shall be reasonably assured. Regulation 7 requires that the buildings provided for a school shall be adequate to permit the safe and convenient passage of persons and movement of goods within the buildings.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Women's Ordination (Compensation)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, how many clergy who have resigned over the ordination of women have not claimed compensation to which they are entitled. [39262]

Mr. Alison: The commissioners' records relate only to clergy who have claimed assistance in accordance with the Ordination of Women (Financial Provisions) Measure. They have no way of estimating how many other clergy eligible for financial provision have resigned as a result of the ordination of women.

However, I understand from the Advisory Board of Ministry that, as at 31 December 1995, figures received from dioceses show no significant difference between the total number of stipendiary clergy who have resigned over the ordination of women and the number of those who have claimed assistance under the financial provisions Measure.

Mr. Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will publish the estimates of the purported cost of the compensation scheme for clergy resigning over women's ordination which the commissioners have undertaken for the latest period for which such calculations have been made. [39264]

Mr. Alison: A total of 314 clergy have resigned to date and an additional 29 have expressed their intention to resign. It is difficult to predict the final number of resignations. However, actual expenditure, including housing costs, in 1994 and 1995 and estimated costings based on an illustrative total of 400 resignations are set out in the table.

Illustration of costs for 400 Resignations

Year	*Gross costs to be met from CC Income £*	*Housing capital (funded by CC) £*	*Net costs for Church £*	*Net housing capital (funded by CC) £*
1994	2,581,000	5,011,000	792,000	5,011,000
1995	3,282,000	2,094,000	1,841,000	1,745,000
1996	2,990,000	1,325,000	1,531,000	974,000
1997	2,770,000	840,000	1,401,000	329,000
1998	2,030,000	350,000	872,000	46,000
1999	1,623,000	182,000	697,000	(213,000)
2000	1,222,000	189,000	507,000	(58,000)
2001	1,005,000	197,000	482,000	(231,000)
2002	942,000	204,000	575,000	(151,000)
2003	783,000	213,000	530,000	28,000
2004	557,000	—	436,000	(288,000)
2005	325,000	—	268,000	(500,000)
2006	212,000	—	188,000	(208,000)
2007	187,000	—	178,000	(324,000)
2008	165,000	—	162,000	(562,000)
2009	142,000	—	141,000	(1,053,000)
2010	135,000	—	135,000	(243,000)
2011	137,000	—	137,000	(506,000)
2012	133,000	—	133,000	(526,000)
2013	133,000	—	133,000	(274,000)
Total	21,354,000	10,605,000	11,139,000	2,996,000

1. The number of resignations shown (400) is a broad estimate, and the final costs could vary substantially.
2. Actual costs are show for 1994 and 1995 based on resignations totalling 232 and 67 respectively in those years, including housing subsidy. A similar pattern of costs has been assumed for future years.
3. The figures make allowance for future increases in house prices and stipends.
4. The net figures take account of such variables as stipends savings (assuming at least a temporary reduction in the payroll), allowance for retirement housing provision which would otherwise have arisen on retirement, and the possibility of some people redeeming loans or leaving rented accommodation once they have obtained alternative employment.

Mr. Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, how many clergy resigned over women priests and gained payment from the compensation scheme in each year since its first payments were made broken down by age of the clergy grouped in convenient decades; and what was the size of the payments made. [39263]

Mr. Alison: A breakdown of this information in respect of the 314 clergy who have resigned to date is shown in the following table.

Year of resignation 1993

Age at resignation	*Number of resigners*	*Total payments in 1994 £*	*Total payments in 1995 £*	*Projected payments in 1996 £*	*Projected payments 1997 to end £*
1993					
30–39	6	89,023	37,983	26,936	0
40–49	5	81,344	37,711	27,964	0
50–59	2	38,353	18,414	17,517	94,175
60–64	2	22,034	9,302	8,758	261
Total	15	230,754	103,410	81,175	94,436
1994					
30–39	49	508,473	481,273	309,820	142,483
40–49	51	520,563	544,668	424,176	188,699
50–59	79	793,197	859,500	691,198	2,705,302
60–64	38	389,256	334,917	184,681	107,093
Total	217	2,211,488	2,220,359	1,609,874	3,143,577
1995					
30–39	6	—	50,847	64,965	77,279
40–49	12	—	134,015	117,001	133,783
50–59	27	—	295,610	300,037	1,438,696
60–64	22	—	233,355	230,400	321,095
Total	67	0	713,827	712,403	1,970,854
1996 (1 January–30 June)					
30–39	2	—	—	25,617	49,102
40–49	1	—	—	10,600	27,028
50–59	8	—	—	104,028	495,290
60–64	4	—	—	51,979	77,635
Total	15	0	0	192,224	649,056

Turnbull Report

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, if the Church Commissioners have considered how many of the Turnbull report recommendations can be implemented without seeking parliamentary approval; and if he will place a copy of their considerations in the Library. [39672]

Mr. Alison: The Church Commissioners have consulted the Standing Committee of the General Synod and the synod's legal advisor has been asked to provide, in conjunction with the official solicitor of the Church Commissioners, an assessment of what could be done without legislation. The results will be considered by the archbishops' advisory group, the standing committee and the Church Commissioners with a view to a response to the recommendation then being made.

Pensions Report

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, when he expects the Church Commissioners to be able to respond fully to each of the main recommendations and requests for further information contained in the fifth report of the Social Security Committee of 1995–96, on Church of England pensions, HC 340. [39606]

Mr. Alison: The Church Commissioners have consulted the Standing Committee of the General Synod and careful consideration is being given to each of the main recommendations of the Social Security Committee. We hope to provide a full response as soon as possible in the autumn.

WALES

Trunk Roads

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to integrate trunk road planning into the process of land use planning. [40063]

Mr. Hague: "Planning Guidance (Wales) Planning Policy" published in May this year includes an outline of the Government's transport planning aims and indicates how development plans can contribute towards integrating transport and land use planning.

Any further consideration of linkages between transport and land use planning will be set out in my transport policy statement in due course.

GP Pharmacies

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dispensing general practices there are in Wales. [40048]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Eighty-nine.

M4 Relief Road

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what investigations have been carried out into possible alternatives to road building in the case of the M4 relief road; and if he will publish the terms of reference of those investigations. [40062]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The development of proposals for the M4 relief road will include an assessment of alternative transport modes. My right hon. Friend and I have no plans to publish the terms of reference.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 23 July, *Official Report*, column *274*, what factors underlay his judgment that release of the breakdown of cases of CJD in the form requested would compromise confidentiality. [40131]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Some CJD patients' friends and family have been very distressed following identification in the press. Details on the number of CJD cases in Wales have already been given and geographic distribution of cases is given in the fourth annual report from the CJD unit. In view of the low numbers involved I do not propose to provide further information which might lead to the possible identification of patients.

I appreciate the present interest in the disease and the need to put statistics in the public domain more frequently. For this reason, Sir Kenneth Calman, Chief Medical Officer at the Department of Health announced on 26 July that CJD statistics will be published on a regular basis. This will provide statistical information only on the number of cases and deaths and will not be specific to individual authority areas.

Birds (Pembrokeshire)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent assessment he has made of the effects on the bird population of the Sea Empress accident off Pembrokeshire in February. [40397]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The daily counts of dead and oiled birds made in the wake of the accident have ceased. The Countryside Council for Wales is undertaking a range of research projects commissioned by the Sea Empress Environmental Evaluation Committee to establish what impact there has been on both breeding and wintering bird populations.

Initial results suggest that Auk colonies on St. Margaret's island and the Castlemartin coast have been severely affected while the internationally important seabird concentrations on Skokholm, Skomer and Grassholm have been relatively unaffected. The impact on the Common Scoter is difficult to assess due to considerable variations in estimated numbers prior to the accident. In all cases longer term data are required.

All results will be reported to Government by SEEEC in its final report due in autumn 1997.

Prescribing costs

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority regarding the late supply of information on prescribing costs to health authorities by the Prescription Pricing Authority. [40674]

Mr. Hague: The Prescription Pricing Authority does not operate in Wales. My officials have written to the Chief Executive of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority about the late supply of information by his prescription information and pricing services division. He has replied with an assurance that the division will be completely up to date by the beginning of March 1997. I am monitoring the situation and have asked for monthly progress reports.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to initiate discussions on reviewing the number of trusts in the Welsh national health service; and if he will make a statement. [40673]

Mr. Hague: None. However, I am prepared to consider proposals put forward by the service.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements he has made for ensuring the financial viability of NHS trusts; what part he has assigned to health authorities for ensuring such viability; and if he will make a statement. [40661]

Mr. Hague: In order to attain trust status an application containing detailed financial projections for the first three years of operation is submitted for approval. These projections are analysed by both of my officials and independent external consultants. Only if the outcome of the analysis is positive is trust status approved.

Once established, a trust is required to report its current and projected financial performance at regular intervals to my officials. Should the financial performance of a trust be unsatisfactory they would have to produce plans for recovery against which they would be monitored.

The health authorities in Wales have no specific role assigned to them in this monitoring process but are involved in the agreement of recovery plans.

University Hospital of Wales Healthcare NHS Trust

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to publish his decision letter on the application for public funding for the new accident and emergency unit at the University hospital of Wales, Heath, Cardiff. [40670]

Mr. Hague: The University Hospital of Wales Healthcare NHS trust is currently preparing a full business case for the development; only when this is completed and approved will a decision on public funding be made.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the University Hospital of Wales Healthcare NHS Trust concerning the application for inclusion in the current public expenditure survey of *(a)* the flyover connecting the hospital to the A48 and *(b)* its proposed new accident and emergency unit. [40671]

Mr. Hague: None.

Drugs Budget

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his current estimate for the aggregate drugs budget overspend for the year 1995–96 and the year 1996–97. [40667]

Mr. Hague: The overspend in 1995–96 expressed in terms of the net ingredient cost was £3.4 million against a total allocation of £267.4 million. At this stage of the year it is impossible accurately to forecast the likely outturn in 1996–97 but the cost of all drugs prescribed will continue to be met.

NHS Computer Software

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairmen of the Welsh health authorities concerning the performance of LK Global and Amsys 20 computer software for general practice fundholders and its impact on management information on prescribing expenditure relative to budget. [40666]

Mr. Hague: None. This is a matter for the parties concerned.

Road and Rail Construction

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what *(a)* subsidies have been made available for road construction and *(b)* investment has been made in railway track construction in Wales in each year since 1979. [40510]

Mr. Hague: Since 1979, total spending by central Government on the roads programme in Wales is nearly £3 billion, including £510 million in transport grants to local authorities. In addition there are a number of other grant programmes which may support road construction but which have wider overall objectives. Details of the extent to which these funds have been allocated to road construction over the period requested could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Figures for expenditure on railway track construction are not available on a Wales only basis. However, details of investment in railway infrastructure in Great Britain are produced by the Department of Transport and published annually by Her Majesty's Stationery Office as "Transport Statistics, Great Britain".

Extra-contractual Referrals

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will list those making representations concerning the contents of the departmental letters of 12 and 20 June concerning extra-contractual referral administration. [39715]

Mr. Hague *[pursuant to his reply, 24 July 1996, c.379]:* I regret that three NHS organisations were inadvertently omitted from the answer. The complete list of extra-contractual referrals received is therefore as follows:

Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust

Derwen NHS Trust

Rhondda NHS Trust

Carmarthen and District NHS Trust

Nevill Hall and District NHS Trust

Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS Trust

Gwent NHS Trust

North Wales NHS Trust

Powys Healthcare NHS Trust.

School Exclusions and Expulsions

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will publish for the last available three years for each county and for Wales as a whole, the number of school exclusions or expulsions recorded for *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* all schools, indicating the percentage of such exclusions or expulsions as a proportion of overall pupil numbers in each case. [38944]

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[pursuant to his reply, 23 July 1996, c.276]:* I regret that the table provided was incorrect. The correct table is as follows:

Permanent exclusions during 1994–95 academic year from:

LEA	Primary schools		Secondary schools		Total primary and secondary schools	
	Number	Exclusions as percentage of roll	Number	Exclusions as percentage of roll	Number	Exclusions as percentage of roll
Clwyd	17	0.04	61	0.23	78	0.11
Dyfed	2	0.01	34	0.14	36	0.06
Gwent	9	0.02	89	0.29	98	0.13
Gwynedd	2	0.01	25	0.16	27	0.07
Mid Glamorgan	23	0.04	75	0.19	98	0.10
Powys	1	0.01	8	0.10	9	0.04
South Glamorgan	16	0.04	58	0.20	74	0.10
West Glamorgan	3	0.01	48	0.20	51	0.08
Wales	73	0.02	398	0.20	471	0.10

All figures are provisional.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many women from ethnic minorities are employed by his Department and its agencies; at what grade; and what measures he has taken to encourage the *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* employment and *(c)* promotion of women from ethnic minorities within his Department and its agencies. [39894]

Sir John Wheeler: Staff of the Northern Ireland Office (London) are monitored through the provision of information is voluntary.

Responses show that the following women from ethnic minorities are currently employed:

Grade 7: One

Executive Officer: Five

Administrative Officer: Two

Personal Secretary: One

Typist: Four

Administrative Assistant: Two.

The Northern Ireland Office has an equal opportunities policy of non-discrimination in recruitment and promotion on the grounds of race, sex, disability or political/religious beliefs.

Equal opportunities awareness training is given to all staff.

It is not possible to provide the information requested in respect of the Northern Ireland civil service. The Race Relations Act 1976 does not apply to Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland civil service does not undertake ethnic monitoring of staff. However, the NICS equal opportunities policy embraces all staff and applicants for employment, including those who are members of ethnic minority groups.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will investigate all community representatives' complaints about the conduct of the RUC in recent weeks. [39951]

Sir John Wheeler: Any complaints made by community representatives to my right hon. and learned Friend about the alleged conduct of the RUC are carefully examined and treated by the most appropriate method, according to the nature of the complaints. Those alleging misconduct by individual officers are referred to the RUC complaints and discipline branch for investigation under the oversight of the Independent Commission for Police Complaints. Those which concern police operational policies are referred to the Chief Constable of the RUC for advice. In all cases, a reply is issued from Government.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what intimations of resignation from the RUC he has been informed about in recent weeks because of policy on the control of marches; and what action has been taken. [39968]

Sir John Wheeler: The Royal Ulster Constabulary's personnel branch is not aware of any resignations, or intimations of same, as a result of policy on the control of marches.

Cookstown Blockade

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the Police Authority for Northern Ireland's investigations into the involvement of one of its members in a blockade at Cookstown in the period 5 to 11 July. [39906]

Sir John Wheeler: This is a matter for the Police Authority for Northern Ireland. I am advised that the authority held a special meeting on 30 July at the request of a member against whom allegations had appeared in the press. A report was presented to the authority and the member concerned gave an account of his actions. The authority accepted his account of the events at issue and agreed that no further action was necessary. The authority now regards the matter as being closed.

Multiple Births

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many sets of *(a)* twins, *(b)* triplets, *(c)* quadruplets, *(d)* quintuplets and *(e)* sextuplets were born in Northern Ireland in each year since 1990; how many maternities there were in each year; and how many multiple births in each category were conceived as a result of (i) in vitro fertilisation, (ii) gamete intra-fallopian transfer and (iii) other forms of assisted conception. [39970]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is set out in the table.

Type	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*[1]1995*
Set of:						
(a) twins	267	315	258	308	303	324
(b) triplets	5	6	8	9	6	7
(c) quadruplets	—	—	—	—	—	2
(d) quintuplets	—	1	—	—	—	—
(e) sextuplets	—	—	—	—	—	—
IVF [2]						
(i) twins	12	11	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
(ii) triplets	2	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
GIFT [3]						
Maternities	26,338	26,058	25,425	24,729	24,119	23,663

[1] Provisional.
[2] These figures are as result of IVF by year of conception.
[3] Gamete intra-fallopian transfer (GIFT) was available in Northern Ireland only in 1986 and 1987.
n/a = not available.

Mr. Lindsay Robb

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 23 July, *Official Report*, column *254*, what payments have been made by the RUC to Mr. Lindsay Robb other than those made under the witness protection scheme; and on what dates. [40140]

Sir John Wheeler: No payment has been made to Lindsay Robb out of RUC expenditure, but as stated in my answer of 23 July, he received taxpayer-funded financial assistance under the witness protection scheme.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will make a statement on the eligibility of people from Northern Ireland to be members of the Northern Ireland Criminal Cases Review Commission; [40307]

(2) if he will make a statement on progress towards the establishment of a Northern Ireland Criminal Cases Review Commission; [40305]

(3) what will be the *(a)* functions and *(b)* powers and remit of a Criminal Cases Review Commission in Northern Ireland. [40306]

Sir John Wheeler: A Criminal Cases Review Commission is being established to investigate alleged miscarriages of justice and, if necessary, to refer cases back to the Court of Appeal. Its remit will cover England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Home Secretary and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who are currently responsible for considering such cases, will cease to do so once the commission is established.

The commission is a statutory body whose functions, powers and remit are set out in the Criminal Appeal Act 1995. It will comprise a chairman and a minimum of 10 board members. At least one third of the members must be legally qualified, whilst at least two thirds must have previous experience of the criminal justice system. One member, at least, must have knowledge or experience of the Northern Ireland criminal justice system. Subject to these provisions, selection is through open competition and is in accordance with the recommendations of the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life. Accordingly, advertisements for the recruitment of members appeared in the press in May, including the three Northern Ireland daily newspapers.

The selection process is under way and it is expected that the commission will begin work early in 1997.

341 and 342 Rathfriland Road, Dromera

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of state for Northern Ireland what was *(a)* the original distance between the entrances to 341 and 342 Rathfriland road, Dromara submitted to and passed by the Department of the Environment in 1988, *(b)* the distance inthe amended plan accepted by the Department and *(c)* the actual distance now the work has been completed and passed by the Department. [40380]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Planning Service under its chief executive, Mr Wesley Steward. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from W. D. Glass to Rev. Martin Smyth, dated 14 October 1996:

Mr Moss has asked me to reply, in the absence on annual leave of Mr. T W Stewart, Chief Executive of the Planning Service, to your Question about the approved and actual distances between the entrances to Nos. 341 Rathfriland Road, Dromara.

I would respond to the three specific points raised in your Question as follows:

(a) The distance between the entrances of 341 and 342 Rathfriland Road, Dromara, as submitted and approved under planning application Q/88/0208 in 19988 was 16 metres.

(b) The distance between the entrances as approved in the amended application Q/89/013 was 4 metres.

(c) The actual distance between the entrances as constructed is 10.5 metres.

All of the above dimensions are measured between the centre-line of the two accesses.

High-risk Prisoners

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is his policy in relation to periods of temporary release of unescorted high-risk prisoners from top security gaols; when the policy was last reviewed; and if he will make a statement; [40542]

(2) what policy is followed when an unescorted high-risk prisoner is given temporary release in relation to procedures for informing airports to be used by the prisoner and the police force in the area into which he will be travelling; and if he will make a statement. [40543]

Sir John Wheeler: This is a matter for the Prison Service under its chief executive, Mr. Alan Shannon. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Alan Shannon to Mr. Alfred Morris, dated 14 October 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to the two Parliamentary Questions you tabled about the policy in relation to periods of temporary release of unescorted high risk prisoners.

There are two schemes under which high risk prisoners are regularly considered for short periods of temporary release. These are:

the compassionate temporary release scheme which allows prisoners to visit immediate relatives who are very seriously ill or to attend their funerals;

the home visit scheme which allows prisoners who have served at least 6 years to visit immediate relatives who are non-ambulant and have been unable to visit the prisoner for a period of at least 18 months in the first instance.

High risk prisoners may also be considered for leaves which are available to prisoners nearing the end of sentence. These are the *pre-release home leave scheme, the seven day allowance scheme* for prisoners who served in excess of 11 years and the *Christmas home leave scheme* which is available to prisoners who have served in excess of 11 years or are in their final year of sentence.

Prison Service Headquarters is responsible for approving all applications under the compassionate leave scheme and home visit scheme. In addition Prison Service Headquarters is responsible for approving the first instance of leave under the other schemes. These applications are considered very carefully and will be refused if it is felt there is a significant risk of absconding or danger to the prisoner or the public.

The last major change in procedures was in 1983 when the compassionate release scheme was suspended for 6 months after two paramilitary prisoners failed to return from a period of leave. Since then, until the recent abscond, no high risk prisoner has failed to return to prison from leave or has been charged with criminal offences arising out of behaviour while on leave.

It is standard practice to inform the Royal Ulster Constabulary of the temporary release of all prisoners.

HEALTH

Climate Change

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the studies *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated by his Department into the impact of climate changes on the health of the United Kingdom population. [40071]

Mr. Horam: The Department has not commissioned any research which is directly related to the impact of climate change on health. However, we are considering the findings of the climate change impacts review group which identified some possible health effects. In the light of the outcome of this consideration and on-going research we will review our programmes and research requirements.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average expenditure per head in *(a)* each health authority and *(b)* nationally in the last financial year. [39921]

Mr. Horam: The average per capita expenditure figures for 1996–97 will not be available centrally until the annual accounts process has been completed in early December 1996.

The figures will be placed in the Library as soon as they are available.

Beta Interferon

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the prescription of beta interferon; [39926]

(2) what representation his Department has received of guidelines EL(95)97 being disregarded. [39925]

Mr. Horam: Executive letter (95)97 issued to health authorities in November 1995 suggested that, where it is clinically appropriate to prescribe beta interferon to treat multiple sclerosis, treatment should be initiated after assessment by hospital neurologists. The guidance was accompanied by clinical advice from the Standing Medical Advisory Committee. Decisions about prescribing in individual cases are a matter for clinical judgment.

The Department has received some representations about the implementation of EL(95)97. Where appropriate, such representations are followed up with the authorities concerned.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding he has made available for a national trial of beta interferon. [39927]

Mr. Malone: A final decision on funding will be taken once a satisfactory protocol addressing the concerns on outcome measures has been developed.

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women from ethnic minorities are employed by his Department and its agencies; at what grade; and what measures he has taken to encourage the *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* employment and *(c)* promotion of women from ethnic minorities within his Department and its agencies. [39902]

Mr. Horam: Information showing the number of women from ethnic minorities, by grade, employed by the Department and its agencies is as follows:

Number of ethnic minority female staff in Department of Health and agencies (excluding regional offices)

Grade	*Ethnic minority staff*
Senior Civil Servant	4
UG6	3
UG7	12
SEO	9
HEO	24
EO	76
AO	187
AA	65
Total	380

The Department has taken the following measures to encourage women from the ethnic minorities:

Recruitment and employment: The Department and its agencies follow the Cabinet Office guidance and civil service recruitment policies and procedures which incorporate best recruitment practices.

Promotion: Women from the ethnic minorities, like other staff, are encouraged to attend appropriate development training, giving them the opportunity to develop skills that will better prepare them for promotion opportunities.

All personnel policies, practices and procedures are monitored by gender, disability and ethnicity to ensure that they are free of bias and prejudice. The Department and its agencies are committed to following the policies in the Cabinet Office programme for action on race and have actively supported research commissioned by the Cabinet Office into the potential double disadvantage faced by ethnic minority women in the civil service.

In order to improve recruitment, employment and promotion of female staff, the Department has introduced a range of initiatives including flexible working, career breaks and subsidised child care facilities. Also available is positive action training for women from ethnic minorities and staff with disabilities.

The Department participates in the Windsor Fellowship scheme for undergraduates from ethnic minorities and encourages its ethnic minority working group, a staff reference group, which discusses issues affecting staff from the minority ethnic groups.

Psychiatric Patients

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the average length of stay of psychiatric in-patients in each of the last five years broken down to show cases involving *(a)* voluntary and *(b)* compulsory admissions. [39993]

Mr. Burns: The information is not available centrally.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients, by county of birth were admitted to psychiatric beds in the last year. [40132]

Mr. Burns: Information concerning the place of birth of hospital in-patients is not collected centrally.

Arbitration

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 July, *Official Report*, column *112*, if each NHS region uses the same principles in its arbitration process on contract settlements between NHS purchasers and providers; and what measures have been taken by the NHS Executive since March 1991 to ensure that these principles are consistent between regions. [40270]

Mr. Malone: National health service regions are required to resolve disputes as speedily as possible in the best interests of patients and the NHS. The great variety in the circumstances in which disputes arise precludes the imposition of a narrow set of principles for their resolution.

Heartlands and Solihull Hospitals

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he made of the proposals by Birmingham and Solihull hospital trust for ambulance transport to Heartlands hospital from local villages with special reference to Meriden, Hockley Heath, Knowle Dorridge, Hamden in Arden, Cheswick green and Balsam common in the event of a medical emergency when making his recent statement on the provision of 24-hour accident and emergency services at Solihull hospital; and if he will make a statement; [40264]

(2) what assessment he has made of Solihull health authority's proposals for 24-hour accident and emergency services; [40226]

(3) what assessment he made of the provision of bus services from remote villages to Birmingham Heartlands trust when he made his decision to merge Birmingham Heartlands hospital with Solihull hospital; and if he will make a statement. [40233]

Mr. Horam: Provision of accident and emergency services were included in the consultation document, "Difficult Choices", which was considered when making the decision to approve the merger of Birmingham Heartlands hospital and Solihull hospital. Issues surrounding patient access were raised during consultation on the formal merger proposal.

Since the merger took place consultant cover has improved in the Solihull accident and emergency department—from 0.5 whole-time posts to two—and the number of patients treated locally at the Solihull site is increasing with plans to treat an additional 16,000 patients at the hospital in the coming year.

Diabetes

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the mortality rate from diabetes by county of birth in the last year. [40129]

Mr. Horam: The following table shows mortality rates for diabetes per county of residence in 1994 the latest figures available. Data by county of birth is not available centrally.

Area	*Number of deaths*	*Rate (per 100,000 of population)*
Greater London	717	10
Greater Manchester	313	12
Mersey	144	10
South Yorkshire	137	10
Tyne and Wear	118	10
West Midlands	379	14
West Yorkshire	246	12
Avon	126	13
Bedfordshire	53	10
Berkshire	75	10
Buckinghamshire	55	8
Cambridgeshire	77	11
Cheshire	97	10
Cleveland	55	10
Cornwall and Scilly Isles	91	19
Cumbria	53	11
Derbyshire	140	15
Devon	126	12
Dorset	82	12
Durham	70	12
East Sussex	87	12
Essex	200	13
Gloucestershire	60	11
Hampshire	146	9
Hereford and Worcester	65	9
Hertfordshire	71	7
Humberside	100	11
Isle of Wight	16	13

Area	Number of deaths	Rate (per 100,000 of population)
Kent	197	13
Lancashire	181	13
Leicestershire	93	10
Lincolnshire	99	16
Norfolk	109	14
Northamptonshire	42	7
Northumberland	33	11
North Yorkshire	78	11
Nottinghamshire	159	15
Oxfordshire	53	9
Shropshire	39	9
Somerset	74	15
Staffordshire	103	10
Suffolk	89	14
Surrey	110	11
Warwickshire	60	12
West Sussex	89	12
Wiltshire	66	11
Clwyd	44	11
Dyfed	43	12
Gwent	65	14
Gwynedd	35	15
Mid-Glamorgan	69	13
Powys	18	15
South Glamorgan	33	8
West Glamorgan	34	9

Source:
Office of National Statistics.

Health Lines

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health authorities *(a)* have a staffed service on their freephone health line and *(b)* pre-recorded taped advice. [40244]

Mr. Malone: All health authorities have responsibility for securing provision of a staffed freephone health information service for their resident populations.

Some choose to provide the service themselves whilst others place contracts with outside providers. In total, there are currently 23 health information service providers covering all health authorities. Of these, five have a pre-recorded taped advice service, in addition to their staffed service.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 30 November, *Official Report*, column *868*, if he will list the nature, value and location of all private finance initiative projects in the NHS with a project value of £1 million or more which have been approved since November 1995. [40281]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 15 January at column *343*. Since then a further 19 schemes with a project value of £1 million or over have been approved.

PRIVATE FINANCE SCHEMES WITH A CAPITAL VALUE OF £1 MILLION OR OVER APPROVED SINCE 15 JANUARY 1996

Northern and Yorkshire Region

1. St. James's and Seacroft University Hospital National Health Service Trust—£50 million—paediatric wing, car park, medipark and private patients unit.

2. United Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust and Bradford Hospitals Trust—£3 million—reconfiguration of pathology laboratories.

3. Leeds Community and Mental Health Services Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust—£2.5 million—North West community Unit for the Elderly.

4. Leeds Community and Mental Health Services Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust—£2.5 million—West Central Community Unit for the Elderly.

Trent Region

5. Rotherham General Hospitals NHS Trust—£3.4 million—clinical waste incinerator.

6. Rotherham General Hospitals NHS Trust—£1.1 million—concourse development.

7. Nottingham Ambulance NHS Trust—£1.3 million—radio replacement scheme.

Anglia and Oxford Region

8. Royal Berkshire and Battle NHS Trust—£20 million—2 multi-storey car parks, office accommodation, private patient wing, leisure centre and retail outlets.

9. Norfolk and Norwich NHS Trust—£170 million—new District General Hospital.

North Thames Region

10. Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Trust—£5 million—Hospital Information Support System.

11. Central Middlesex NHS Trust—£18 million—Ambulatory Care and Diagnostic Centre

South Thames Region

12. Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust—£5 million—clinical information system.

13. Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust—£6.1 million energy centre.

South and West Region

14. Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust—£90 million rebuilding scheme at Princess Margaret Hospital.

West Midlands Region

15. City Hospital NHS Trust—£2.9 million—replacement patient administration scheme.

North West Region

16. Warrington Hospitals NHS Trust—£1 million—magnetic resonance imager (MRI).

17. Bolton Community NHS Trust—£1.6 million—Primary Care Resource Centre.

18. Liverpool Women's Hospital NHS Trust—£2.7 million—Hospital Information Support System.

19. Lancashire Ambulance Service NHS Trust— £2.1 million—mobile radio communications system.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total value of private finance initiative projects in the NHS with project values of less than £1 million that have been approved in each financial year up to 1995–96 and so far in the current financial year. [40282]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much capital spending has so far been committed by the private sector for the current financial year in respect of health service projects under the private finance initiative. [40338]

Mr. Horam: Information on the amount of capital committed by the private sector is not collected centrally. Capital expenditure incurred in the building and provision of facilities for a health service project occurs before the project becomes operational. The national health service thereafter is committed to the revenue payments for the service provided by the private sector in projects under the private finance initiative.

Mental Health

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* ethnic minority and *(b)* white patients were admitted to mental health beds in the last available year. [40138]

Mr. Burns: Information concerning the ethnic background of hospital in-patients was collected centrally for the first time in 1995–96. This information is not yet available.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* ethnic minority and *(b)* white patients were sectioned under the Mental Health Act 1983 in each year since 1983. [40139]

Mr. Burns: This information is not available centrally.

Funding

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is being carried out with regard to the allocation of funding in NHS health trusts. [40182]

Mr. Horam: Any research into the allocation of funding within national health service trusts is a matter for the individual trust concerned. Trusts are not funded directly by the Department but from contracts with purchasers.

Paediatric Intensive Care Beds

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many paediatric intensive care beds were in use in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1996; [40194]

(2) how many paediatric intensive care beds per head of the population there were in *(a)* West Yorkshire and *(b)* the rest of England in the last year for which figures are available. [40183]

Mr. Horam: Information on provision of paediatric intensive care is not available for 1979. Children from West Yorkshire needing such care may receive it within Northern and Yorkshire region, or in the adjoining north west region. Information for Northern and Yorkshire and for England is as follows.

Area	*Beds open*[1] *April 1996*	*Population*[2] *(0–16 years)*	*Beds per thousand children*
Northern and Yorkshire Region	28	1,467,354	1 : 52
England	196	10,639,921	1 : 54

Sources:
[1] "Paediatric Intensive Care: Report from Chief Executive of the NHS Executive to the Secretary of State" (May 1996).
[2] Office for National Statistics (1995).

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to ensure the adequate provision of paediatric intensive care beds in the Yorkshire region. [40205]

Mr. Horam: Health authorities in West Yorkshire have agreed funding for additional paediatric intensive care beds at both United Leeds Teaching Hospitals, national health service trust and St. James's and Seacroft University Hospitals national health service trust. An emergency bed service will also be in place by this winter, providing accurate information on the availability of intensive care beds, including paediatric provision.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what access the Association of Community Health Councils of England and Wales has to his Department's CHC policy and liaison group; and if he will make a statement; [40114]

(2) if he will make it his policy *(a)* that the relationship existing before 1 July between his Department and individual community health councils and *(b)* the independence of community health councils will be protected following the setting up of the CHC policy and liaison group. [40119]

Mr. Horam: The role of the community health council policy and liaison group is to advise on policy and operational matters concerning CHCs in general. It has no involvement with individual CHCs, which remain statutorily independent bodies.

The Association of CHCs for England and Wales has been invited to meet with the group twice yearly and the first meeting will take place on 17 October.

Bishop Auckland Hospital

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the contract for the private finance initiative rebuilding of Bishop Auckland hospital to be signed; if he will publish the terms of the contract; what private finance initiative funding will be provided; and if he will make a statement. [40173]

Mr. Horam: The full business case for the private finance initiative scheme at Bishop Auckland hospital is currently with the National Health Service Executive and Her Majesty's Treasury. Ministers are also currently considering the outcome of County Durham health authority's review of acute services in Durham. No decision can be taken on the approval of the PFI scheme at Bishop Auckland hospital until this exercise is complete. It is too early to say what the final capital value of the PFI scheme will be, or when the contract is likely to be signed.

The terms of the contract will be commercial in confidence.

Health Information Service

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what obligations rest on health authorities to make NHS users aware of the freephone health information service; and if he will make a statement on how this obligation is being fulfilled. [40243]

Mr. Malone: Guidance on the provision of the freephone health information service (HSG(95)44—copies of which are available in the Library—requires health authorities to ensure that details concerning the availability of the service, including opening times, are widely publicised. How this is best done is determined locally.

Secure Hospitals

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* violent offences and *(b)* other offences have been committed by individuals released from secure hospitals under the Government's care in the community programme; and if he will make a statement. [39890]

Mr. Burns: The figures shown in the table include restricted patients discharged from national health service and independent hospitals. Separate figures are not kept on patients discharged from secure hospitals and data on unrestricted patients is not available.

Table showing reconviction of restricted patients

Year	Total discharged for first time	Reconvicted for grave offences[1] within		Reconvictions within 5 years—standard list offences[2]	
		2 years	5 years[3]	2 years	5 years[3]
1984	148	1	5	19	34
1985	134	3	5	14	20
1986	92	3	7	14	27
1987	87	—	4	3	8
1988	94	1	2	4	6
1989	138	—	—	8	12
1990	100	2	3	6	9
1991	90	—	—	4	—
1992	147	1	—	6	—
1993	130	1	—	6	—
Total	1,160	12	—	84	—

Notes:

[1] Offences for which the maximum sentence is life imprisonment, mainly homicide, serious wounding, rape, buggery, aggravated burglary, arson where life is not endangered.

[2] All indictable offences and certain summary offences.

[3] After 1990, data no longer held in this form.

Source:

Home Office Statistical Bulletin, Statistics of Mentally Disordered Offenders England and Wales 1995.

Depression

Mr. Barry Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies have been *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into (i) how many working days in the UK each year are lost as a result of and (ii) the cost of depression. [40303]

Mr. Burns: We are not aware of any such studies.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of depression have been diagnosed in the UK in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [40302]

Mr. Burns: This information is not available centrally for England. Questions relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of the cost of the incidence of depression to the UK economy. [40304]

Mr. Burns: We have made no such studies or estimates.

Blood Products

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals have installed equipment to read the new bar code system for blood products; and what estimate he has made of the number of hospitals which require such equipment. [40291]

Mr. Horam: The new bar coding system for blood bags which is currently being introduced by the national blood service is for internal use. It does not require the installation of new equipment by hospitals, as existing bar codes continue in use alongside the new ones.

Emergency Ambulance Services

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to ensure in the trials he is initiating concerning prioritisation of emergency ambulance calls that *(a)* those responsible for such judgments have had extensive crew experience and *(b)* a full report of the initial schemes is (i) made public and (ii) open to comment prior to extensions of the principles elsewhere. [40401]

Mr. Horam: We have accepted the recommendation of the steering group on ambulance performance standards that responses to 999 calls be prioritised according to the seriousness of the patient's clinical need. The principle of call prioritisation was endorsed in the consultation document published in July 1995, copies of which are available in the Library, and the proposed changes were widely supported.

Two call prioritisation systems have been approved. These have been successfully operated in other countries and have already been tested in two United Kingdom ambulance services alongside existing methods of ambulance despatch. A research report on these systems was published in July 1996, copies of which are available in the Library, and found both safe and reliable. Decisions as to the priority of calls can safely be made by control room staff trained to operate these systems.

Four ambulance services plan to implement call prioritisation from 1 April 1997. The Department of Health is commissioning a study of the new systems in operation in these services and will publish this.

Abortions

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many abortions took place under the NHS during each of the past five years; and what the estimated cost was in each year. [40459]

Mr. Horam: The number of national health service abortions performed to residents and non-residents of England and Wales, for the years 1991–94 inclusive can be found in the relevant year's edition of "Abortion Statistics, England and Wales, Series AB numbers 18-21", published by HMSO, copies of which are available in the Library.

The provisional total for the number of abortions which took place under the NHS in 1995 is 108,930.

Information on the cost of an abortion is no longer collected centrally. Therefore no estimate can be made.

Chernobyl

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State's letter—DOH(6)4362/92—of 12 May to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, what is the result of the investigations of chemicals which might contribute to germ-line variation. [40460]

Mr. Horam: Investigations into the germ-line effects pursuant to the findings in children born in Belarus contaminated by the Chernobyl accident are being carried out under the European Union radiation fission safety programme. New studies will attempt to avoid possible confounding factors by using a local control population. These studies are likely to continue for some years before publication of results.

Prostin E2

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the side effects of the labour-inducing drug Prostin E2; and if he will make a statement. [40326]

Mr. Malone: As for all marketed medicines, the side effects of Prostin E2 were assessed at the time of granting of the marketing authorisation and continue to be monitored by the Medicines Control Agency. The recognised side-effects are described in the manufacturer's product information, which is authorised by the licensing authority.

Bed Closures

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the likely level of bed closures in the South Thames and North Thames regions *(a)* in the remainder of the current financial year and *(b)* in 1997–98. [40597]

Mr. Malone: It is for health authorities to plan an appropriate level of service for local people, and for national health service trusts to determine the bed capacity required to meet those needs.

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccine

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the consultation undertaken with *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* potential recipients on the second MMR vaccination programme in schools begun on 1 October; and what is the estimated cost of the programme. [40493]

Mr. Horam: The introduction of a second dose of measles, mumps and rubella vaccine into the United Kingdom childhood immunisation programme was recommended by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, an independent expert committee which advises the UK health departments. The JCVI contains a wide range of expert knowledge, including people working in the field of child health, general practice and nursing. The Chief Medical Officer held a consultative meeting with senior representatives of the Royal College of General Practitioners, the general medical services committee of the British Medical Association, the Health Visitors Association, the Royal College of Nursing and the Royal College of Midwives before announcing the introduction of the second dose and received the full endorsement of these professional organisations for this improvement to the childhood immunisation programme. The chairman of the GMSC, along with representatives of the RCGP, HVA, RCN and RCM, attended the press launch of the second dose and gave it his full backing.

The recommendation to offer the second dose was a clinical decision. However, during the 1994 measles-rubella schools immunisation campaign the Department was made very aware of considerable support from parents, whose children were too young for the campaign, for their children to have boosters as well. The uptake of 92 per cent. achieved during the measles-rubella campaign was a clear demonstration of children's and parent's desire to be fully protected against these diseases. Consultation with the parents of potential recipients takes place between doctor and parent on an individual basis. Officials also met representatives of the Association of Parents of Vaccine Damaged Children before the introduction of the second dose.

The annual cost of the routine second dose is about £7 million.

South Thames Medical Directors

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken in response to a letter to him from the South Thames medical directors dated 26 February; and if he will place a copy of his reply in the Library. [40598]

Mr. Malone: The Secretary of State asked William Wells, chairman, South Thames region, to consider the medical directors' letter in carrying forward the programme of work on emergency and intensive care that he announced in Parliament on 6 March 1996. A copy of the correspondence will be placed in the Library.

Health Services (London)

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the number of cancellations of elective surgery in London hospitals last winter and the consequent impact upon both *(a)* patients and *(b)* the health service; and what action he has taken to prevent a recurrence of such cancellations; [40596]

(2) what assessment he has made of the congestion in accident and emergency departments in London last winter; and what action he has taken to remedy the situation [40595]

Mr. Malone: The Secretary of State assured the House on 6 March 1996, *Official report,* column *356,* that the national health service would learn from the experiences of last winter. Since then, preparing for emergency demand in winter has been a priority, and every health authority working with its trusts has prepared plans. The plans reflect local circumstances and national guidance and good practice. In drawing them up, health authorities and trusts have considered relevant local factors such as trends in activity and emergency admissions, the capacity for providing treatment and the scheduling of non-urgent treatments, the provision of intensive care facilities, bed management within hospitals and arrangements for the admission and discharge of patients, and developments and initiatives in patient care and treatment. The Secretary of State received a report, on those plans from the chief executive of the NHS Executive at the end of September.

Health authorities and NHS trusts across the two Thames regions have produced action plans for improving emergency care services which are being refined and will be monitored throughout the winter. Implementation plans for the co-ordination of accident and emergency services across London are being consulted upon.

Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects to conclude negotiations on the 1993 annual financial returns for the PPRS; [40357]

(2) what excess profits have been repaid by rebate or price reduction, and by how many pharmaceutical companies, for their 1993 PPRS sales. [40358]

Mr. Malone: Aggregate information on repayments for the 1993 round of annual financial returns will be published next spring in the Department of Health's second report to Parliament on the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme.

Children's Services

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals his Department has made for revising the formula used to calculate the standard spending assessments for children's services to be used in the financial year 1997–98; and what assessment he has made of the effect of those revisions on the annual allocations for the London borough of Newham in *(a)* cash and *(b)* percentage terms compared to 1996–97. [40408]

Mr. Burns: All proposals for changes to the calculation of standard spending assessments for 1997–98 are described in the report of the standard spending assessments sub-group of the settlement working group, copies of which are available in the Library.

Research Funding

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research funding the Government have provided for *(a)* breast cancer, *(b)* AIDS and *(c)* prostate cancer in each of the last five years. [40399]

Mr. Horam: The information is shown in the tables:

(a) Breast cancer

£000s

	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Medical research council	2,700	1,600	3,100	3,100	3,114
Department of Health	381	526	607	725	888
Scottish Office Home and Health Department	138	13	84	123	282

(b) AIDS

£000's

	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Medical research council	13,300	15,900	15,300	16,200	14,900
Department of Health	593	786	789	834	693
Scottish Office Home and Health Department	163	139	97	78	169

(c) Prostate cancer

£000's

	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Medical research council	300	300	300	78	0
Department of Health	0	0	0	0	0
Scottish Office Home and Health Department	0	0	0	0	0

Government funding for research takes account of activity in other sectors. The cancer charities spent some £105.6 million on research into cancer in 1994–95. There is very little charity research expenditure on AIDS.

Occupational Ill Health

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the average annual costs to the NHS of treating occupational ill health over the last 10 years. [40418]

Mr. Horam: This information is not collected centrally.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Out-of-hours Service

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the demand on the out-of-hours emergency payments service of the Benefits Agency *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in the north-west and *(c)* in Warrington for the financial year 1995–96. [37556]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of Income Support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 19 July 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will make a statement on the demand on the out of hours (emergency payments) service of the Benefits Agency *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in the North West and *(c)* in Warrington for the financial year 1995–96.

The information is not available in the format requested. This is because statistics are collated at Area Directorate (AD) level and not by region. The "North West" region is taken to be the area covered by Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Lancashire. Prior to April 1996, the ADs covering the north west were Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Lancashire and Cumbria.

Below I have, listed the number of referrals to the Out of Hours Service (OOHS) for the year 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996. The number of referrals for Warrington is included in the total referrals for Greater Manchester (AD).

It should be noted that a referral means a contact by the customer or by a third party on their behalf. Approximately 50 per cent. of the referrals require a visit by the Benefits Agency. There are no figures kept about the success or otherwise of those visits.

1995–96 referrals to OOHS

National: 54,868

Merseyside AD: 4,405

Greater Manchester AD: 2,977

Lancashire and Cumbria AD: 2,648

From April 1996 these ADs have merged into two which are North West Coast and Greater Manchester ADs.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women from ethnic minorities are employed by his Department and its agencies; at what grade; and what measures he has taken to encourage the *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* employment and *(c)* promotion of women from ethnic minorities within his Department and its agencies. [39904]

Mr. Burt: The Department employs 3,179 ethnic minority women. Eight of these are in grades 3 to 7, 552 are in middle management grades and 2,620 are in clerical or other grades.

The Department and its agencies follow the Cabinet Office guidance and civil service recruitment policies and procedures which incorporate best recruitment practices. This includes placing advertisements in the ethnic minority press and with local racial equality councils. The adverts routinely incorporate a welcoming statement to minority groups including ethnic minorities.

Where there are significant ethnic minority populations in the catchment areas, outreach work has been undertaken. Recruitment exercises are monitored to ensure equal treatment for all applicants and recruitment panellists have received equal opportunities awareness training.

The Department and its agencies monitor by gender, disability and ethnicity all its personnel policies, practices and procedures to ensure that they are free of bias and prejudice. They are committed to following the policies in the Cabinet Office programme for action on race and have actively supported research commissioned by the Cabinet Office into the potential double disadvantage faced by ethnic minority women in the civil service.

Staff are encouraged to attend appropriate development training, giving them the opportunity to develop skills that will better prepare them for promotion opportunities. Also available are positive action training courses for women, ethnic minorities and staff with disabilities.

Each step in the promotion process is subjected to equal opportunities monitoring. All promotion board panellists have received appropriate equal opportunities, to ensure staff are promoted on merit.

Family Expenditure Survey

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 21 June, *Official Report*, column *635*, if he will list the distribution of income by decile group in each year from 1979 to 1992–93, including the self-employed, as in table A1 in the households below average income report for 1995 *(a)* unadjusted and *(b)* adjusted in accordance with the statistical practice of correcting for variations in FES response which he reports to his Department has applied to this series of low income surveys. [40204]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is as follows:

Changes in real income by decile group 1979 to 1992–93 including the self-employed

(a) Unadjusted

Before housing costs

	Decile group medians					*Total population (mean)*
	Decile 1 bottom 10 per cent.	*Decile 2 10–20 per cent.*	*Decile 3 20–30 per cent.*	*Decile 4 30–40 per cent.*	*Decile 5 40–50 per cent.*	
1979	89	112	130	149	167	193
1992–93	90	120	146	172	203	261
Percentage change	(1)	(7)	12	16	22	35

After housing costs

	Decile group medians					*Total population (mean)*
	Decile 1 bottom 10 per cent.	*Decile 2 10–20 per cent.*	*Decile 3 20–30 per cent.*	*Decile 4 30–40 per cent.*	*Decile 5 40–50 per cent.*	
1978	75	96	111	128	144	167
1992–93	61	95	117	145	176	227
Percentage change	(–19)	(0)	(5)	13	23	36

1. Incomes are £ per week equivalised at March 1995 prices.

2. Estimates in brackets ( ) are particularly uncertain.

(b) Adjusted

Before housing costs

	Decile group medians					*Total population (mean)*
	Decile 1 bottom 10 per cent.	*Decile 2 10–20 per cent.*	*Decile 3 20–30 per cent.*	*Decile 4 30–40 per cent.*	*Decile 5 40–50 per cent.*	
1979	90	113	131	150	168	198
1992–93	90	122	147	174	206	269
Percentage change	(0)	(8)	12	16	23	36

After housing costs

	Decile group medians					*Total population (mean)*
	Decile 1 bottom 10 per cent.	*Decile 2 10–20 per cent.*	*Decile 3 20–30 per cent.*	*Decile 4 30–40 per cent.*	*Decile 5 40–50 per cent.*	
1979	75	96	112	129	146	171
1992–93	62	96	119	148	180	235
Percentage change	(–18)	(0)	(6)	15	23	37

1. Incomes are £ per week equivalised at March 1995 prices.
2. Estimates in brackets ( ) are particularly uncertain.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the factors taken into account in postponing publication from July to November of the households below average income report. [40152]

Mr. Mitchell: The later publication this year of households below average income—HBAI—is due to several factors. The first is that the family expenditure survey has moved from a calender year to a financial year basis. As a natural consequence, the FES data was available to the Department of Social Security nearly three months later than in the previous year. Last year's HBAI reported on the period ending December 1993; this year's will report on the period ending March 1995. In the current round of HBAI preparation, DSS analysts have undertaken additional tasks: principally, a review of methodology and the preparation of data from the family resources survey on which future editions of HBAI will be based. The processing of the FRS data, which became available in the spring, for HBAI analysis has been a substantial piece of work which is still in progress. The HBAI will be published as soon as the analysis is complete, which we expect to be in mid-November.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what steps his Department is taking to ensure that statutory sick pay is paid to individuals who are made redundant within three days of falling ill; [40200]

(2) what steps his Department is taking to ensure that statutory sick pay is paid to people who fall sick in the period immediately following their employers' liquidation. [40206]

Mr. Heald: Individuals who are made redundant would not normally be eligible for statutory sick pay. Where it can be shown that the employer has brought an individual's contract of service to an end solely or mainly to avoid liability for SSP, the employer will continue to be liable to make a payment in the normal way. For employees whose employer has gone into liquidation but whose contracts have not been terminated, any SSP due in that employment from the date of insolvency becomes the liability of the Secretary of State.

These rules are highlighted in the Contributions Agency's statutory sick pay manual for employers, which is issued to all employers.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when his Department last reviewed the guidelines for payment of statutory sick pay to individuals whose firms have been liquidated. [40208]

Mr. Heald: The practical operation of these rules, as with all rules of the statutory sick pay scheme, is continuously monitored by the Contributions Agency. They were last changed in 1987 in order to make it easier for employees of insolvent employers to receive the SSP due to them.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations his Department has received regarding the payment of statutory sick pay for people made redundant due to liquidation of their employer. [40207]

Mr. Heald: None.

Decision Making and Appeals

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will publish an analysis of the responses to his consultation paper on improving decision making and appeals in social security, Cm 3328, in a similar format to the analysis of responses to the consultation on Government measures to tackle discrimination against disabled people published in January 1995; [40224]

(2) if he will publish the comments on his consultation paper on improving decision making and appeals in social security, Cm 3328, from *(a)* the Social Security Advisory Committee, *(b)* the Council on Tribunals, *(c)* the Social Fund Commission, *(d)* the Chief Adjudication Officer and *(e)* the President of the Independent Tribunal Service; [40225]

(3) if he will place in the Library a list of those who have responded to his consultation papers on improving decision making and appeals in social security, Cm 3328,

and if he will place in the Library copies of their responses except where the respondents have requested that their replies be treated in confidence. [40223]

Mr. Roger Evans: We plan to publish a summary analysis of the responses to the consultation on the Government's proposals for improving decision making and appeals in a format broadly similar to that adopted last year for the responses to the consultation document "Government measures to tackle discrimination against disabled people". This included details of respondents but not copies of individual replies.

Housing Benefit (Ashe Hall)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many residents of Ashe hall, Derbyshire, are currently in receipt of housing benefit. [40333]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Department of Social Security does not collect or keep information about housing benefit recipients at particular addresses. South Derbyshire district council is responsible for administering housing benefit in the area covering Ashe hall in Etwall, Derbyshire. It advises that housing benefit is currently in payment to 16 residents there.

Consultation Papers

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the consultation papers issued in the form of command papers by his Department since July 1988, with the date of publication and the date by which responses were invited in each case; and if he will give similar information so far as it is available in respect of other consultation papers issued by his Department. [40222]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the tables. Table 1 lists all the consultation papers that have been issued in the form of Command Papers since July 1988. Available information about other consultation papers that have been issued by the Department is in table 2.

Table 1: Command papers

Cm Number	*Title*	*Publication date*	*Response date*	*Notes*
1264	Children Come First—the Government's proposals on the maintenance of children	29.10.90	14.12.90	White Paper consultation on how proposals should be put into effect
1723	Options for Equality in State Pension Age	18.12.91	30.6.92	Green paper
2594	Security, Equality, Choice: The Future for Pensions	23.6.94	5.8.94	White Paper consultation on draft compliance cost assessment (Appendix 5)
2997	Compensation Recovery	2.10.95	13.11.95	Reply to Select Committee consultation paper included as annex
3328	Improving Decision Making and Appeals in Social Security	23.7.96	18.10.96	Green Paper
3345	The Treatment of Pension Rights on Divorce	29.7.96	29.11.96	Green Paper

Table 2: Other consultation papers

Title	*Publication date*	*Response date*
Disability Allowance: Assessment and Adjudication	01.08.90	12.10.90
Disability Handbook	11.07.91	20.08.91
Review of Treatment of Earnings for Income Tax and National Insurance Purposes	29.07.91	September 1991
The Proposed Contents of the Child Support Regulations to be made under the Child support Act 1991	November 1991	16.12.91
One Stop— Benefits Agency Service Delivery	July 1992	06.11.92
Changes in Maternity Pay—Proposal for Implementing the EC Pregnant Workers Directive	10.08.93	12.10.93
A Consultation on the Medical Assessment for Incapacity Benefit	01.12.93	11.02.94
Occupational Pensions—Discussing the Issues: set of 7 consultation papers		
papers 1-5	02.12.93	14.01.94
papers 6 and 7	17.12.93	21.01.94
Age Related Rebates—a Consultation Paper	December 1993	15.01.94
The Future for Pensions—the Selection and Appointment of Member-Nominated Trustees	June 1994	05.08.94
Family Credit and Self—Employment	24.06.94	31.08.94
The Future for Pensions—a Requisite Benefits Test	15.07.94	09.09.94
A Consultation on Government Measures to Tackle Discrimination Against Disabled People	15.07.94	07.10.94
Non State Pension Reform—the Structure of the Levies	19.07.94	07.10.94
Statutory Sick Pay—an Alternative to the Small Employers' Relief Scheme	31.08.94	21.10.94
Consulting on—Statutory Sick Pay—Cutting Red Tape	28.03.95	30.06.95
The Pensions Bill: Secondary Legislation—Contracting Out—Series of 15 Consultation Papers		
papers 1–5	26.05.95	30.06.95

Table 2: Other consultation papers

Title	*Publication date*	*Response date*
papers 6 and 7	01.06.95	30.06.95
papers 8–10	29.06.95	28.07.95
papers 11 and 12	28.06.95	28.07.95
paper 13	23.08.95	29.09.95
paper 14	25.10.95	22.11.95
paper 15	05.12.95	08.01.96
Piloting Change in Social Security–Helping People Into Work	05.07.95	08.10.95
Pensions Bill—Specifications for Regulations on the Minimum Funding Requirement	06.07.95	25.08.95
The Pensions Bill: Consultation on Secondary Legislation—Internal Dispute Resolution Procedures	07.07.95	20.08.95
Pensions Act 1995—Consultation Paper: Indexation Regulations	21.07.95	11.08.95
Specification for Regulations on Surplus and Excess Assets on Winding Up	24.07.95	04.09.95
The Pensions Act 1995: Secondary Legislation Transfer Values—six papers	26.07.95	25.08.95
The Pensions Act 1995: Secondary Legislation—Uniform Accrual	26.07.95	25.08.95
Specifications for Regulations Arising from Sections 16 to 21 of the Pensions Act 1995—the Provisions for Member-Nominated Trustees and Directors	27.07.95	08.09.95
Pensions Act 1995—Specifications for Regulations—Provision of Information to Scheme Members	02.08.95	15.09.95
Pensions Act 1995—Specification for Regulations on Power to Defer Winding Up and Priorities and Discharge of Liabilities on Winding Up	09.08.95	08.09.95
Pensions Act 1995—Specification for Regulations on Employer-Related Investment and Fund Management	15.08.95	18.09.95
Pensions Act 1995—Specifications for Regulations on Scheme Administration—three papers		
paper 1	18.08.95	06.10.95
paper 2	25.08.95	16.10.95
paper 3	25.09.95	15.11.95
Specification for Pensions Ombudsman Regulations	22.08.95	29.09.95
The Pensions Act 1995: Secondary Legislation—giving effect to protected rights—two papers		
paper 1	30.08.95	21.09.95
paper 2	18.09.95	13.10.95
The Pensions Act 1995: Consultation on Secondary Legislation—the Compensation Arrangements for Occupational Pension Schemes	20.09.95	25.10.95
The Pension Schemes Act 1993: consultation on secondary legislation relating to the jurisdiction of the Pensions ombudsman	26.09.95	27.10.95
Pensions Act 1995—consultation paper—unapproved schemes	25.10.95	22.11.95
Pensions Act 1995—specification for regulations—consultation paper —deficiencies in pension scheme assets	30.10.95	01.12.95
Proposed changes for directors' national insurance contributions	31.01.96	29.03.96
Compliance Cost Assessment, compensation recovery scheme	14.02.96	29.04.96
A consultation by the Government on regulations relating to the initial rights of access to goods, facilities and services and on the timetable for implementing the remaining rights	06.03.96	02.05.96
Pensions Act 1995—Pension schemes levies frozen and paid-up schemes—proposals for levy waiver	22.03.96	03.05.96
Pension Schemes Act 1993: consultation on amending secondary legislation relating to the operation of the Pension Schemes Registry	03.04.96	10.05.96

Table 2 omits:
(a) consultation papers issued only to the Social Security Advisory Committee, other advisory bodies of Local Authority Associations;
(b) consultation papers issued by the advisory bodies themselves rather than the Department (the SSAC usually allows four to six weeks for comments);
(c) consultation on draft regulations under the Pensions Act 1995 (details of consultation papers issued prior to the regulations are in the table);
(d) most consultation exercises on operational matters (including consultation on claim forms, customer surveys, local initiatives);
(e) any consultation papers concerning which records are not readily available.

Social Fund

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total expenditure of the social fund for each of the past five financial years; and what the administrative costs were and what proportion they were of expenditure. [40284]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

As the social fund's business involves both paying money out and recovering the amounts awarded as loans, the most appropriate measure of the cost of operating the fund is a comparison between administration costs and gross expenditure plus recoveries. This information is therefore also given in the table.

Year	*Gross benefit expenditure £ million*	*Administration costs £ million*	*Administration costs as a percentage of gross benefit expenditure*	*Administration costs as a percentage of gross benefit expenditure plus recoveries*
1990–91	280	132	'47	'32.5
1991–92	361	163	'45	'32
1992–93	402	'208	52	35

Year	Gross benefit expenditure £ million	Administration costs £ million	Administration costs as a percentage of gross benefit expenditure	Administration costs as a percentage of gross benefit expenditure plus recoveries
1993–94	442	[2]270	61	41
1994–95	451	209	46	30.5

[1] Includes one off IT development and capital costs of £17 million.

[2] Includes one off IT development and capital costs of £45 million.

[3] Figures differ slightly from those previously published which did not include any cold weather payments.

[4] 1994–95 is the most recent year for which estimated actual administration costs are available.

Family Resources Survey

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the new family resources survey report for 1994–95 is intended to serve different functions from the households below average income report. [40153]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The family resources survey is a relatively new and unfamiliar survey which collects a wide variety of information which is expected to be of interest outside the Department of Social Security. Hence, to raise awareness in the wider community, the report summarises survey results for 1994–95, gives details on the background to the survey, describes methods used to collect and process the information and discusses data quality. Gross household income is used, in some tables, to group survey households when reporting characteristics of these households. The FRS report does not seek to transform survey data into estimates of the distribution of income in Great Britain. It therefore serves a different function from the households below average income report. The HBAI seeks to provide an accurate picture of the disposable income distribution. This is achieved by undertaking further work on the survey results, for example, adjusting income for household size and composition, creating a measure of "disposable" income, assessing the impact of housing costs and grossing results to reflect the population as a whole. The next edition will include results based on the FRS.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the equivalent monetary value in pounds per week at April 1995 prices, for the family resources survey report for 1994–95 following table A2 of the households below average income report for 1992–93, before and after housing costs of the decile means and medians of the two poorest decile groups and the richest decile group and the total population mean of *(a)* single adults and *(b)* couples with (i) no children, (ii) one child aged three, (iii) one child aged 16 years, (iv) two children aged three and eight years, (v) three children aged three, eight and 11 years and (vi) three children aged 11, 16 and 17 years. [40163]

Mr. Mitchell: The information is not available as processing of the family resources survey data for 1994–95 to provide analyses of income on the households below average income definition has not yet been completed. However some information on this basis will be available in the next edition of households below average income.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the disposable income of households in *(a)* the lowest decile and *(b)* the highest decile in (1) 1994–95 and (2) 1992, at April 1995 prices, on the basis of the family resources survey, for the households with (i) one adult, one child (ii) one adult, two or more children, (iii) one man, one woman, one child, (iv) one man, one woman, two children, (v) one man, one woman, three children, (vi) two adults, four or more children, (vii) three adults, one or more children and (viii) four adults, one or more children. [40188]

Mr. Mitchell: Processing of the family resources survey data for 1994–95 to provide estimates of disposable income by decile has not yet been completed. Some information on this basis will be available in the next edition of households below average income, which is expected to be published in mid-November. It should then be possible to provide estimates as requested, subject to sample size limitations for some of the smaller groups.

Figures for 1992 based on the FRS are unavailable. The FRS began in October 1992 but did not build to its full fieldwork size until January 1993. The first months were largely intended to test the fieldwork operation of this new complex survey. Results are only partial and have never been validated. The Department does not propose releasing any analyses based on 1992–93 FRS results and the data have not been deposited in the data archive at Essex university.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the answer of 19 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *1264*, what was the disposable income of households in the family resources survey of 1994–95 and the family expenditure survey for 1993, at April 1995 prices in *(a)* the week lowest decile and *(b)* the highest decile in actual terms per week and as a percentage of the median for (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) Greater London. [40156]

Mr. Mitchell: Figures from the family expenditure survey in 1993 prices were given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary in reply to the question of 19 July. It is the normal practice of the Office for National Statistics that FES survey data are available only in the prices of the survey year.

Processing of the family resources survey data for 1994-95 to provide analyses of income on the households below average income definitions has not yet been completed. However some information from both the FES and the FRS will be available in the next edition of the HBAI, which is expected to be published in mid-November. It should then be possible to provide estimates from the HBAI database as requested, subject to sampling size limitations.

Family Credit

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the eligibility criteria for family credit in terms of income in 1988 and in each year since then. [40239]

Mr. Roger Evans: The income threshold for eligibility to family credit will vary depending on each family's individual circumstances. For each family size, there is a maximum amount of family credit payable. This consists of an adult credit (the same amount is payable for both couples and lone parents), a child credit for each child (the amount payable depends upon age) and, from July 1995, an additional credit for people who work 30 hours or more a week.

If a family's net income—after allowable disregards—is below an "applicable amount", the maximum amount of family credit is payable. If their income is above the applicable amount, 70p of every £1 of the excess is deducted from the maximum payable.

The level of family credit rates since 1988 are set out in the table.

Family Credit Rates

£

	Adult credit	*Child credit for ages under 11*	*Child credit for ages 11–15*	*Child credit for ages 16–17*	*Child credit for age 18*	*30 hour credit*	*Applicable amount*
1988	32.10	6.05	11.40	14.70	21.35	—	51.45
1989	33.60	7.30	12.90	16.35	23.50	—	54.80
1990	36.35	8.25	14.15	17.80	25.10	—	57.60
1991	38.30	9.70	16.10	20.05	27.95	—	62.25
1992	41.00	10.40	17.25	21.45	29.90	—	66.60
1993	42.50	10.75	17.85	22.20	31.00	—	69.00
1994	44.30	11.20	18.55	23.05	32.20	—	71.70
1995	45.10	11.40	18.90	23.45	32.80	10.00	73.00
1996	46.45	11.75	19.45	24.15	33.80	10.30	75.20

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of savings to date from the changes in the reduced earnings allowance; and what estimate he has made of savings over 12 months. [40463]

Mr. Roger Evans: The estimated savings from the changes to reduced earnings allowance introduced with effect from 24 March 1996 are £25 million in 1996–97.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the outcome of his review of weather monitoring stations for the purposes of cold weather payments, with specific reference to Tiree and Loch Glascarnoch, Ross-shire. [40660]

Mr. Roger Evans: The review has now been completed. Amending regulations were laid before the House on 11 October.

During last winter, over 7 million payments totalling £62 million were made. A comprehensive review was undertaken, which included commissioning the Meteorological Office to advise on the optimum number of weather stations required to provide national coverage with a reasonable level of local sensitivity. They were also requested to advise on the respective postcode links for each proposed weather station. Representations made by hon. Members were considered by the Meteorological Office in giving its expert advice. I will be writing to each of the hon. Members shortly.

In line with the Meteorological Office expert advice, I propose to increase the total number of weather stations from 55—the number used last winter—to 70. This increased number of weather stations should improve the sensitivity of the scheme throughout the country.

New weather stations at Loch Glascarnoch and Aultbea have been introduced to serve parts of the inland and coastal areas of the hon. Member's constituency. The weather station at Tiree will continue to be used for the Isles of Skye, Tiree, Rhum, Eigg and Muck.

Copies of the Meteorological Office report have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cash and numerical total of cold weather payments made in the last two winters; and if he will make a statement. [40066]

Mr. Evans: The totals for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96 are 10,969 payments worth £76,786 and 7,252,023 payments worth £62,000,000[1] respectively.

The difference in expenditure is not just attributable to the relative severity of each winter; it also reflects the increased value of each payments from £7.00 to £8.50.

[1]Rounded to nearest £1 million.

Compensation Recovery Scheme

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to announce the Government's response to recent consultation exercises on the compensation recovery scheme. [40057]

Mr. Lilley: An announcement of the Government's intention to reform the compensation recovery scheme was made on 9 October. I wrote to the hon. Member at that time.

The Government intend to reform the compensation recovery scheme so that damages for pain and suffering can be paid in full. We therefore propose that compensators should be made liable for all relevant social security benefits paid to the victims of injury or disease. Damages paid to the victim will be adjusted accordingly to ensure that victims are not doubly compensated.

Legislation to reform the compensation recovery scheme will be introduced at the earliest opportunity. We propose that the rules of the reformed scheme will apply to all compensation claims outstanding at the point of change. The implementation date will depend on when parliamentary time can be made available for the necessary amending legislation.

We plan to remove the small payments limit, below which compensation recovery does not take place, at the same time.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received from hon. Members concerning complaints and queries of constituents with regard to the Child Support Agency. [40065]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Information collected on correspondence about the agency's work does not differentiate between complaints and inquiries or requests for information. I am therefore unable to provide specific information relating to the number of complaints received. The table shows the numbers of ministerial correspondence—excluding correspondence principally concerning child support policy issues—received each year since the launch of the Child Support Agency.

	Number
1993–94	[1]6,275
1994–95	1,349
1995–96	1,465
1996–97 (April–August)	688

[1] This is an aggregate figure of chief executive correspondence and ministerial correspondence; separate details for ministerial and chief executive correspondence are not available for 1993–94.

Pensions Ombudsman

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the implications of the High Court judgment in the case of Hillsdown Holdings for the powers and procedures of the pensions ombudsman. [39916]

Mr. Heald: I understand that the High Court dismissed the appeal against the pensions ombudsman's determination in the Hillsdown Holdings case. The pensions ombudsman is an independent statutory commissioner. His powers and procedures are set out in the Pension Schemes Act 1993 and in regulations made under that Act. Although these powers are being amended and extended as from April 1997 by the Pensions Act 1995 and consequent regulations, this is not as a result of the Hillsdown Holdings case. We have no plans for any changes following the High Court ruling in that case.

National Insurance

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be total contribution income for national insurance for 1995–96, 2000–01, 2010–11, 2020–21 and 2030–31, assuming *(a)* present contribution rates, *(b)* upper and lower earnings levels linked with earnings and *(c)* upper and lower earnings levels linked with earnings and the upper earnings level raised to 200 per cent. of average earnings, relative to current estimates of expenditure on benefits in those years. [38543].

Mr. Burt *[pursuant to the reply, 24 July 1996, c. 562-63]:* The information given regarding the estimated contribution income from national insurance in table C was incorrect. The correct information is as follows.

The available information is in the tables.

Table (a): National Insurance Fund—Estimated contribution income [£ billion at 1994–prices] at present contribution rates for 1994–95, 2000–01, 2010—11, 2020–21 and 2030–31 as a percentage of estimated benefit expenditure [£ billion at 1994–95 prices] for those years.

	1994–95	2000–01	2010–11	2020–21	2030–31
Income	36.4	45.1	55.1	64.0	69.6
Expenditure	39.9	42.2	50.8	56.4	63.8
Income as a percentage of expenditure	91	107	109	113	109

Table (b): National Insurance Fund—estimated contribution income [£ billion at 1994–95 prices], assuming upper and lower earnings limits for Class 1 contributions linked with earnings, for 1994–95, 2000–01, 2010–11, 2020–21 and 2030–31 as a percentage of estimated benefit expenditure [£ billion at 1994–95 prices] for those years

	1994–95	2000–01	2010–11	2020–21	2030–31
Income	36.4	45.2	54.9	64.6	71.8
Expenditure	39.9	42.2	50.8	56.4	63.8
Income as a percentage of expenditure	91	107	108	114	113

Table (c): National Insurance Fund—estimated contribution income [£ billion at 1994–95 prices], assuming upper and lower earnings limits for Class 1 contributions linked with earnings and the upper earnings limit raised at 200 per cent. of average earnings, for 1994–95, 2000–01, 2010–11, 2020–21 and 2030–31 as a percentage of estimated benefit expenditure [£ billion at 1994–95 prices] for those years

	1994–95	2000–01	2010–11	2020–21	2030–31
Income	37.5	46.6	56.7	66.7	74.2
Expenditure	39.9	42.2	50.8	56.4	63.8
Income as a percentage of expenditure	94	110	112	118	116

1.The information given in the tables has been derived from the Government Actuary's Reports on the Third Quinquennial Review under section 137 of the Social Security Act 1975 (HC 160) and on the Financial Provisions of the Pensions Bill 1994 (Cm 2714) by—adjusting the entries in tables E3 and E4 of HC 160 so that the projected contribution income is based on a continuation of the 1994–95 combined Class 1 contribution rate (18.25 per cent.). Hence, the tables give information for 1994–95 rather than 1995–96; adjusting contribution income for the years 2020–21 and 2030–31 to allow for the increased number of contributors expected as a result adjusting the amounts of contracted-out rebate to allow for the difference between rebate rates assumed in HC 160 and those now expected.

2.For table (c), a further adjustment has been made to allow for the change in primary Class 1 contributions and rebates following from increasing the UEL to twice average earnings.

3.The estimated benefit expenditure information given in all three tables is than consistent with increasing the UEL and LEL in line with prices, even where (in tables (b) and (c)) the contribution income figures are based on increasing those limits in line with earnings, and allows for the effects of the Pensions Act 1995.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

DEFENCE

Procurement Ethics Code

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where Crown servants were involved in procurement procedure and subsequently joined a relating project company without permission and various sections of the code of procurement ethics are likely to have been breached, what action he will take under section 3.4 of the code. [13980]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Investigations would be made into the circumstances but no action would be taken under section 3.4 of the code since the breach would be of a condition of service and not fraudulent or criminal activity.

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many women from ethnic minorities are employed by his Department and its agencies; at what grade; and what measures he has taken to encourage the *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* employment and *(c)* promotion of women from ethnic minorities within his Department and its agencies. [39892]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department and its agencies have in place a wide range of measures to improve the quantity and level of representation of people of ethnic minority origin—both men and women—in the civilian work force. A separate range of measures is also aimed at all women staff and potential recruits, irrespective of their ethnicity. These measures, which are defined in the MOD's action programmes for race and women, include a civilian ethnic minority steering committee, which meets annually with one of my ministerial colleagues and separately with senior officials; recruitment and promotion monitoring; participation in the Windsor fellowship scheme for graduates of ethnic minority origin; equal opportunities awareness training for staff and managers; and personal effectiveness training programmes for women and ethnic minority staff. My Department has also recently reviewed its equal opportunities policy and practice as these impact on ethnic minority staff and related issues; it is also a member of the business in the community initiative "Race for Opportunity"; and it has participated in a Cabinet Office study to research how "double disadvantage" affects women of ethnic minority origin in the civil service. All of these measures and initiatives contribute to the provision of equality of opportunity in my Department for women from the ethnic minorities. The information requested about the number of ethnic minority women employed in the MOD and its agencies are as follows.

MOD Permanent Staff by Graded Equivalence Ethnic Minority Women

	As at 1 April 1996
Former grades 1 to 5	0
Grade 6	0
Grade 7	5
SEO	6
HEO	20
EO	62
AO	235
AA	215
Non-industrial	543
Industrial	81
Total	624

1. Figures derived from responses to ethnic origin survey.
2. Part-timers counted as whole units.
3. Excludes all "below the line" staff and casuals.

Personnel (Germany)

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the annual cost of locally employed civilian personnel who work for the British Army in Germany excluding those working at the headquarters of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps; [40275]

(2) what is the total annual cost of the stationing of British Army and related British civilian personnel in Germany, excluding those serving in the headquarters of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps; [40273]

(3) what is the annual cost of *(a)* British Army personnel serving at the headquarters of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps in Germany, *(b)* British civilian personnel serving at the headquarters of Allied Rapid Reaction Corps in Germany and *(c)* locally employed civilians working for British personnel at the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps in Germany. [40274]

Mr. Soames: The expected cost of British military, British civilian and locally employed civilian personnel working in the headquarters Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps and British Army (Germany) during the financial year 1996–97 was as follows:

British Military personnel

HQ ARRC: £12.280 million

BA(G): £630.420 million

Total: £642.700 million

British Civilian personnel

HQ ARRC: £0.239 million

BA(G): £60.560 million

Total: £60.800 million

Locally employed civilians

HQ ARRC: £0.240 million

BA(G): £252.52 million

Total: £252.76 million.

These figures reflect personnel salary costs only. It should be noted that a significant proportion of the locally employed civilian work-force is comprised of dependants of British military and civilian personnel.

The impact of the deployment of HQ ARRC and other personnel to former Yugoslavia is not reflected in these figures, as these costs are being captured as part of the overall cost of operations there.

The British civilian and locally employed civilian costs of HQ ARRC are a disproportionately low as HQ United Kingdom Support Command (Germany)—part of British Army (Germany)—provides it with a large number of infrastructure and support services.

Radio Spectrum

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list recent spectrum sharing arrangements between military and civil users. [40318]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department has for many years pursued a policy fo sharing its spectrum with civil usage where military interests are not prejudiced. For example, in the 400 to 450 MHz band, channels have been shared or released for civil use including channel tunnel communications co-ordinated with France, private business radio in conurbations, civil data services, police helicopter communications and HM Customs and Excise communications UK-wide.

Shortage of spectrum for cellular telephones led to a sharing arrangement of MOD training spectrum at 870 to 888 MHz and 915 to 933 MHz. As these band are given up by the cellular operators, they will be shared with other civil users under European co-ordination agreements. These frequency bands are subject to retrieval by the Department when necessary.

Wideband channels have been agreed in the bands 2340, 2400 and 2420 MHz for use by outside broadcasting operators, subject to military site restrictions. In addition, two wideband channels at 3425 and 3475 MHz have been agreed for wireless local loop installations, although some prior co-ordination of transmitter sites may be required to protect military installations.

Wideband channels have been agreed for local area network MOD spectrum at 10.15 to 10.3 GHz subject to military site restrictions.

Permanent sharing arrangements exist in the aeronautical radionavigation bands for military and civil aircraft. Similarly, MOD bands are shared with amateur radio operators, on a non-interference basis to military systems, which allows the amateurs the freedom to develop their activities without detailed case-by-case co-ordination.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made by the joint review of the Radiocommunications Agency and the Ministry of Defence into releasing the entire 225 to 400 MHz band. [40314]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The band is a harmonised band for tactical military communications throughout all NATO nations. In concert with NATO nations, we have agreed to release some spectrum in the band for use by terrestrial digital audio broadcasting and the emergency services. There are no plans to release the whole of the 225 to 400 MHz band for civil use.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures his Department has of the efficiency of its use of the radio spectrum on the basis of *(a)* time, *(b)* geography and *(c)* other criteria.[40312]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The spectrum allocated to the MOD is managed by the Department to meet requirements of the military services in the UK for a wide variety of systems and for those of visiting forces. In these circumstances, sharing in time is rarely an option. Geographic separation is the main criterion for the re-use of frequencies and is widely used in the efficient management of the spectrum. The MOD procedures equipment which is efficient in the use of spectrum when it is suitable for defence needs.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of his Department's minimum needs in the radio relay sub-bands in the area of 225 to 400 MHz. [40311]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The band 225 to 400 MHz is a harmonised frequency band throughout all NATO nations for tactical military communications. NATO has agreed to the release of the band 225 to 230 MHz for broadcasting use and two 5MHz sub-bands in the range 380 to 400 MHz for use by the emergency services.

The Army has reviewed its requirements for spectrum to support tactical military communications and has concluded that a further reduction in spectrum available for this purpose in this band would be prejudicial to operational effectiveness.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what stage has been reached in the monitoring process for the Ministry of Defence's release of the 380 to 399.9 MHz band to civil broadcasting systems in the UK. [40315]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The band 380 to 399.9 MHz has not been designated by the International Telecommunication Union as a broadcast band. Within the Conference of European Postal and Telecommunication Administration nations, the band is one of the four designated to be shared with civilian users. Two sub-bands, 380 to 385 and 390 to 395 MHz, have been released, with the agreement of NATO, for use by the emergency services in NATO countries in Europe.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made by the Radiocommunications Agency and the Ministry of Defence to release the spectrum within the 410 to 420 MHz band for civil use by 1997. [40313]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Discussions between the Ministry and the Radiocommunications Agency of the Department of Trade and Industry have identified two bands of 5 MHz in the 410 to 430 MHz band that can be made available for civilian use by 1997.

Mutual Defence Agreements

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to enter into a bilateral agreement with France similar to *(a)* the memorandum of agreement on co-operation concerning nuclear safety and security between the USA and France and *(b)* the 1958 United States–United Kingdom mutual defence agreement. [40279]

Mr. Soames: I have nothing to add to the answer given to the hon. Member on 16 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *37*.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the effect on *(a)* Anglo-French and *(b)* Anglo-American-French nuclear co-operation of the memorandum of agreement on co-operation concerning nuclear safety and security between France and the United States; [40250]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect of the memorandum of agreement on co-operation concerning nuclear safety and security which France entered into with the United States on 4 June on the continued implementation of the 1958 mutual defence agreement between America and Britain, with particular reference to the transferral of information. [40278]

Mr. Soames: No such assessment has been made. Bilateral nuclear co-operation between France and the US is essentially a matter for the two Governments concerned.

RAF Lakenheath

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what occasions since 1966 Her Majesty's Government have made statements relating to the accident at Lakenheath Air Force base on 26 July 1956; and if he will make a statement. [40489]

Mr. Soames: I assume that the hon. Member is interested in the accident which occurred at RAF Lakenheath on 27 July 1956. On 9 November 1979, the Secretary of State for Defence made a statement about the accident, *Official Report*, column *321–22*. This confirmed that no nuclear materials were involved either within the crashed aircraft or in any of the buildings affected; the US authorities have recently re-confirmed this to have been the case.

Private Finance Initiative

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the use of the PFI for the financing of future military equipment contracts. [39952]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The opportunities for exploiting the private finance initiative are explored in all areas of defence expenditure, including military equipment projects, on a case by case basis. There are currently around 60 projects being tested for PFI potential.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what costs to his Department were incurred by the visit of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), to the north-east of England on Friday 19 July; and what officials of his Department accompanied the Minister. [39967]

Mr. Soames: There were no costs to public funds and no official accompanied me.

Service Men (Active Service)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 18 July, *Official Report*, column *645*, if he will list the number of British loan service personnel based in the countries listed by him for each of the last 10 years. [40199]

Mr. Soames: Details of the number of British loan service personnel based in individual countries are confidential between Governments.

1st Battalion Grenadier Guards

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current establishment of the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards; and what is its nominal strength. [40293]

Mr. Soames: The establishment of the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards is 558. The current strength of the battalion—on 1 September—is 475, although some 25 of these are currently detached on other duties or training. In an operational emergency, most of those detached soldiers could return to regimental duty.

2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards were made redundant when the battalion was disbanded. [40292]

Mr. Soames: The number of the 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards made redundant are as follows:

	Phase 1 28th February 1993	*Phase 2 28th February 1994*	*Phase 3 28th February 1995*	*Total*
Officers	2	1	0	3
Soldiers	2	23	12	37
Total	4	24	12	40

Northcote Airfield, Humberside

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what sum Northcote airfield, Humberside was sold. [40294]

Mr. Soames: It is not our practice to disclose the sale price of surplus property as this information is commercially confidential.

RAF Greenham Common

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Her Majesty's Government were first notified of the matters contained in the report on the B47 accident at RAF Greenham Common, sent to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent by his Department on 28 September; if the United States authorities have made available to Her Majesty's Government the expurgated sections of the report: and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library. [40490]

Mr. Soames: The circumstances of the accident which occurred at RAF Greenham Common on 28 February 1958 were known immediately after the event, and a statement was made to the House on 5 March 1958, *Official Report,* columns 133–34. A copy of the expurgated report of the US inquiry in to the accident was received by the Ministry of Defence on 7 August this year, and this is the only version which has been made available to us. I will arrange for a copy of the report to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the contaminated soil and aggregates, removed after the accident at RAF Greenham Common on 28 February 1958, are currently stored: what packaging has been used; what monitoring is conducted to ensure toxic materials, hazardous to the environment, are not released from the burial sites; and what has been the cost to date, in 1996 prices, of the clean–up and subsequent waste management arising from the accident. [40507]

Mr. Soames: The accident at RAF Greenham Common on 28 February 1958 did not give rise to any contaminated soil or aggregates which would have required disposal in the manner suggested. I understand that debris from the accident was disposed of by the US authorities in accordance with their routine procedures as no special precautions were needed. All associated costs were borne by the US authorities.

Gulf War

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the text of the letter sent by his Department to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent on 7 August on depleted uranium use in the Gulf war. [40500]

Mr. Soames: A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Submarine Decommissioning

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the disposal of short and long-lived intermediate-level radioactive waste from the nuclear submarine decommissioning programme in the event that the planned construction of a nuclear waste repository by Nirex in Cumbria is delayed. [40511]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Any intermediate-level waste removed during the de-fuelling, de-equipping and lay-up preparation of the submarine would continue to be stored on-site in suitably licensed facilities until such time as a long-term disposal route became available. The perceived final disposal route remains the deep repository being developed by Nirex early next century. This is kept under review to take account of technical and other developments.

Bomber Refuelling (Diego Garcia)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what time and on what date the United States Government requested permission to use the British base on Diego Garcia for the re-fuelling of bombers during the US military action against Iraq in September 1996; and when Her Majesty's Government acceded to the request. [40495]

Mr. Soames: A request from the United States Government to use the US-operated facilities on Diego Garcia for tanker refuelling was received by Her Majesty's Government on 2 September and approval for this was given later on the same day.

Ammunition

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for each year between 1980 and 1990, in which transfers of 155 mm ammunition to NATO allies took place, the amounts involved and the recipient country. [14858]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* My Department has no record of any Government transfers of 155 mm ammunition during the period. It remains Government policy not to reveal details of exports of defence equipment.

Leyland Truck Fleet

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many 4 tonne trucks his Department possesses; when he last purchased Leyland 4 tonne trucks; how many Leyland trucks were purchased at that date; what was the total cost of the order; how many of his Department's tonne trucks are due for a refit; what is the age of the trucks which are to be refitted; and who will carry out the refit of the trucks. [5546]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 13 December 1995]:* The 4 tonne fleet size currently stands at about 11,300—Bedford MK, Bedford MJ and Leyland—vehicles. The Department last procured 4 tonne Leyland trucks in April 1995, and to date the Department has purchased some 4,200 vehicles at a cost of some £190 million. Following completion of the current pilot study of 60 vehicles to ascertain the scope and likely cost of refurbishment, it is planned to carry out a refurbishment programme on about 4,100 Bedford MJ vehicles during 1995–96 to 2002–03. There is no set age which determines when a vehicle will be refitted. Selection for refurbishment will be based on age, tempered by corrosion condition and mileage, targeting those vehicles that will offer the best value for money. The Department plans to carry out the work in-house through the Army Base Repair Organisation—ABRO—making use of its available capacity. All assembly repairs, other than minor repairs, required to support the programme will be supplied by commercial industry. The work-load forms part of the planned programme for the ABRO former district workshops, which is to be market tested, providing an opportunity to industry to bid for the work.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sandown Bay

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he has issued in respect of the possible effects of the proposed sewer outfall in Sandown bay on the adjoining and nearby fishing grounds and banks. [39780]

Mr. Baldry: None. This Department has not yet been consulted about the changes that may be necessary to Sandown bay sewer outfall to comply with the provisions of the EU's urban waste water treatment directive.

Cattle Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many bovine animals were exported in batches of fewer than 20 animals on the following export health certificates *(a)* EC57, *(b)* EC400, *(c)* EC935 and *(d)* EC2304 during (i) 1994, (ii) 1995 and (iii) 1996. [39848]

Mrs. Browning: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many bovine animals were exported on export health certificate EC56 during *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* 1996. [39847]

Mrs. Browning: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many visits (i) he and (ii) his Ministers made to *(a)* the Newbury constituency and *(b)* other constituencies in the last 12 months. [39868]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In the last 12 months I have made 19 constituency visits; none of these were to the Newbury constituency. My Ministers have made in 185 constituency visits during the same period; of these 1 was to the Newbury constituency.

BSE and Scrapie

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress towards a live test for BSE; and what estimate he has made as to when such a test will be available. [39836]

Mrs. Browning: MAFF has an extensive ongoing research programme into the development of a test to detect BSE in live cattle, valued at £1.825 million this year. Details of this programme were given in the BSE eradication plan, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. It is not possible to estimate when such a test will be developed to a stage when it can be used satisfactorily in the field.

Mr. Ron Davis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle subsequently confirmed with BSE were born in each year from the initial onset of the disease. [40310]

Mrs. Browning: As at 4 October the number of confirmed BSE cases, with known dates of birth, listed by year of birth was:

Year of birth	*Number of cases*
1974	1
1976	2
1977	10
1978	7
1979	40
1980	101
1981	260
1982	1,395
1983	4,480
1984	8,063
1985	11,039
1986	19,626
1987	36,515
1988	21,649
1989	11,543
1990	4,203
1991	2009
1992	270
1993	3

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many sheep since 1990 were confirmed as having scrapie *(a)* in Britain, *(b)* in France, *(c)* in Germany, *(d)* in Italy and *(e)* in total in the European Community. [39838]

Mrs. Browning: Scrapie is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy of sheep and goats which has been known for at least 250 years. The following list shows the number of cases of scrapie in Great Britain per annum up to 3 October 1996. Figures for 1990 to 1992 show the number of recorded cases confirmed at veterinary investigation centres. Between October 1990 and August 1992, payments were offered for cases when brain pools were being assembled for research purposes. Scrapie became a notifiable disease on 1 January 1993.

1990: 348
1991: 989
1992: 666
1993: 327
1994: 199
1995: 163
1996: 129

There are few details on the incidence of scrapie in other member states and the EC has acknowledged that the true incidence is not known. The 1994 edition of the "animal Health Yearbook" states that there are no recorded cases of scrapie in Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal or Spain. Sweden last recorded a case in 1986 and Belgium in 1992. France and Eire are reported to have cases but have not published records of the incidence of the disease. Germany has reported four cases since 1990—one case in each of 1990, 1991, 1995 and 1996.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* sheep were confirmed as having scrapie and *(b)* cattle were confirmed as having BSE in each year since 1990 [39835]

Mrs. Browning: Scrapie is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy of sheep and goats which has been known for at least 250 years. The following list shows the number of cases of scrapie in Great Britain per annum up to 3 October 1996. Figures for 1990 to 1992 show the number of recorded cases confirmed at veterinary investigation centres. Between October 1990 and August 1992, payments were offered for cases when brain pools

were being assembled for research purposes. Scrapie became a notifiable disease on 1 January 1993. From this time onward, cases were confirmed either by histopathology at VICs or by examination of brain by electron microscopy.

Cases of scrapie since 1990 (Great Britain):

1990: 348

1991: 989

1992: 666

1993: 327

1994: 199

1995: 163

1996: 129

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) was first identified in November 1986. The following list shows the number of confirmed cases of BSE in Great Britain up to 30 September 1996.

Cases of BSE since 1990 (Great Britain):

1990: 14,181

1991: 25,032

1992: 36,681

1993: 34,370

1994: 23,944

1995: 14,297

1996: 4,781

Roseclear

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into products with similar ingredients to Roseclear remaining on the market; and if he will make a statement. [36415]

Mrs. Browning: We are assessing whether other amateur use products may present similar risks to users as Roseclear. In the light of this, we may require the manufacturers to produce further safety studies.

Fishing Agreements

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies *(a)* he and *(b)* other Governments of the European Community have (i) commissioned and (ii) evaluated of the effect of fishing agreements made by third-world countries with the Community on the sustainability of their fish stocks and actual or potential effects on their own fishing and related interests. [39908]

Mr. Baldry: United Kingdom registered vessels do not normally fish under fisheries agreements between the European Union and developing countries.

The Overseas Development Administration has funded a number of studies in tropical fisheries management, including one on the licensing of foreign fishing effort in the waters of developing countries, aimed at maximising revenues from these fisheries whilst maintaining their resources. The German Government have also funded some work. In addition, the European Commission evaluates all fisheries agreements between the EU and developing countries and is committed to their being balanced in the interests of both parties as well as responsible in terms of fishing levels and practises.

Casualty Animals

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what incentives exist to ensure that sick casualty animals are given the same treatment at slaughter as healthy animals. [39955]

Mrs. Browning: I assume the hon. Member is referring to the humane treatment of animals at slaughter. There are extensive provisions in the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 to ensure welfare at slaughter of all farmed animals, whether or not for human consumption, and regardless of whether they are sick or injured. It is an offence under these regulations to cause any animal any avoidable excitement, pain or suffering.

It is also an offence under the legislation on the welfare of animals during transport to transport any animal if this is likely to cause it unnecessary suffering. Where an animal is unfit to travel it should be slaughtered on farm. Such slaughter is governed by provisions in the 1995 regulations.

Cattle Slaughter Scheme

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what checks are in place to ensure that the slaughter of all animals in the bovine spongiform encephalopathy cull is in accordance with regulations under the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 and the Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994. [39953]

Mrs. Browning: The welfare at slaughter of all animals, including those in the over thirty month slaughter scheme, is subject to the requirements of the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995. These are enforced in all abattoirs by the Meat Hygiene Service.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he has taken to ensure that animals due for culling are adequately fed. [39956]

Mrs. Browning: The responsibility for ensuring that animals are properly cared for, fed and watered rests with farmers. Advice has been made available on planning feed requirements in the light of current conditions. The State Veterinary Service and ADAS have been instructed to be particularly vigilant for welfare problems and to take action where appropriate. We have also made compliance with welfare requirements, including those that apply during transport, a clear condition of the over thirty month scheme.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what *(a)* logistical and *(b)* economic reasons prevent cattle from being culled on farm; and if he will make a statement. [39954]

Mrs. Browning: EC Regulation 716/96 governing the over thirty month scheme requires that the cattle be slaughtered in specially designated slaughterhouses, except where animal welfare considerations necessitate the on-farm slaughter of an animal. This requirement

enables appropriate veterinary and administrative controls to be applied in order to prevent any part of the animals from entering the food chain and to protect Community and UK Exchequer funding of the scheme.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what estimate he has made of the percentage of cattle slaughtered under the selective cull scheme which could be incubating bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and if he will make a statement; [40260]

(2) if he will press for extension of the selective slaughter policy in the event that a positive link between new cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy and imported cattle is established; and if he will make a statement; [40125]

(3) what assessment he has made of whether cattle slaughtered under the selective cull scheme could be incubating BSE; and if he will make a statement; [40258]

(4) what assessment he has made of the effect of the implication of the accelerated slaughter scheme on the number of cases of active BSE; and if he will make a statement; [40261]

(5) what is his estimate of the reduction in the number of cases of active bovine spongiform encephalopathy which would be removed from the statistics by the implementation of the accelerated slaughter scheme; and if he will make a statement. [40257]

Mrs. Browning: For the present, the Government are not proceeding with the selective cull of cattle in relation to BSE, but will return to cull options in the light of the developing science.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what estimates he has made of the percentage of cattle slaughtered under the over 30 months slaughter scheme which could be incubating BSE; [40256]

(2) what assessment he has made of whether cattle slaughtered under the over 30-months slaughter scheme could be incubating BSE; and if he will make a statement. [40259]

Mrs Browning: No estimates of the percentage of cattle slaughtered under the over 30 month slaughter scheme which could be incubating BSE are available. It is a requirement that all animals slaughtered under the scheme are destroyed and so cannot enter the human or animal feed chains.

Ethnic Minorities

Ms. Abbott: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many women from ethnic minorities are employed by his Department and its agencies; at what grade; and what measures he has taken to encourage the *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* employment and *(c)* promotion of women from ethnic minorities within his Department and its agencies. [39901]

Mr. Boswell: The number and grades of known ethnic minority women in the Ministry including its agencies is as follows:

Grade equivalent	*Number*
Grade 7	2
SEO	3
HEO	12
EO	29
AO	99
AA	91
Total	236

The Ministry has in place comprehensive strategies aimed at ensuring equality and fair representation in recruitment, retention and development of both women staff and of staff of ethnic minority background. These strategies form part of the Ministry's wider equal opportunities policy.

Cattle Imports

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence he has assessed which suggests that imported replacements for cattle lost in the bovine spongiform encephalopathy cull are putting the health of the national dairy herd at risk from *(a)* warbles, *(b)* ticks, *(c)* brucellosis, *(d)* foot-and-mouth and *(e)* bovine pleuropneumonia; and if he will make a statement. [40123]

Mrs. Browning: I am not aware of any evidence to suggest that cattle imported to replace cattle to be slaughtered under the BSE control programme would put the health of the national dairy herd at risk. Clearly increasing trade in live animals does increase disease risk but we are satisfied that the rules for imports of livestock into Great Britain strike the right balance between the removal of barriers to trade and the need to prevent the introduction and spread of serious diseases.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many imported cattle are currently estimated to be at risk from bovine spongiform encephalopathy and if he will make a statement. [40126]

Mrs. Browning: Apart from the United Kingdom there have been recorded cases of BSE in indigenous cattle in France, Portugal, the Republic of Ireland and Switzerland. The numbers of BSE cases confirmed in these countries indicate that the risk of BSE infected cattle being imported is low. The European Commission has called for studies to determine the precise extent of BSE in the Community. A small number of cases of BSE have been recorded in the UK in imported animals but only one, which came from France, is considered with certainty to have been infected before importation.

Pet Food

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how much mammalian meat and bone meal from bovine sources is incorporated into pet food; and if he will make a statement; [40228]

(2) how much mammalian meat and bone meal is incorporated into pet food; and if he will make a statement. [40227]

Mrs. Browning: Statistics for the total quantity of mammalian meat and bone meal from bovine sources incorporated into pet food are not available.

Because of our concerns that pet food containing MBM might present a possible risk of cross-contamination of livestock feed, new measures to prevent this were introduced on 1 August. The Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Order 1996 now prohibits the production of this material on the same premises as livestock feed unless this takes place in a separate building and there is no contact with equipment or vehicles used in the production of livestock feed.

Where pet food containing MBM is stored or sold it must now be either physically separated form any feed for livestock or securely packaged with no leakage or spillage. Equipment used for handling or moving the material must not be used for livestock feed. Pet food containing MBM must not be transported with feed for livestock unless both types of material are securely packaged with no spillage or leakage.

The Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Order 1996 also generally makes it an offence for MBM or material containing MBM to be present on farms or at feed mills. The only legitimate destination for MBM is now for pet food, for inclusion in domestic fertiliser or disposal to landfill (for material produced by the slaughter of animals under 30 months of age going for human consumption). The legislation requires that all movements and use of MBM have to be recorded and accompanied by appropriate documentation. This will ensure that all consignments of MBM, whether produced in this country or imported, are fully traceable.

Food Surpluses

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans exist for EU food surplus distribution schemes in the next 12 months; and if he will give details of them. [40189]

Mr. Baldry: An EU surplus food scheme was introduced in 1988. This will continue in place next year, but there are no plans to distribute food in the United Kingdom through the scheme. Last November my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced, as part of the Government's expenditure plans, the UK's permanent withdrawal from participation, in line with the recommendations of the Ministry's fundamental expenditure review.

Bovine Somatotropin

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to allow the experimental use of the growth hormone BST on dairy cattle in the United Kingdom. [40229]

Mrs. Browning: None. The use of BST in dairy cattle is subject to an EC moratorium until 31 December 1999, which allows for limited practical tests to obtain any additional scientific data that might be taken into account in taking a final decision on the authorisation of BST. Applications for such tests would have to be approved by the EC's Standing Veterinary Committee. No application has been received in the United Kingdom.

Bovine Brain and Spinal Columns

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what health and safety requirements in respect of the removal of the brain and spinal column from cattle have been published and on what date; from what date such material was required to be removed; and if he will make a statement. [40249]

Mrs. Browning: The Bovine Offal (Prohibition) Regulations 1989, which came into force on 13 November 1989, required brain and spinal cord, as well as certain other offals, to be treated as specified bovine offal (now known as specified bovine material—SBM) and prohibited such material from use for human consumption.

The Department of Health in conjunction with the Health and Safety Executive and the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens have published a number of guidelines on the handling of brain and spinal cord and other BSE issues. These include "Categorisation of pathogens according to hazard and categories of containment", HSE and DoH, 1990, and "Precautions for work with human and transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies", ACDP, HSE and DoH, 1994.

In addition, the Health and Safety Commission issued on 16 August this year, new general guidance on BSE for occupational groups. This new guidance re-affirms the precautions recommended in the other guidance material on BSE published since 1990 as outlined above. It follows a detailed review of all the earlier publications specific to the various sectors of employment. This new guidance has been published jointly by the HSC, the Department of Health and MAFF.

Crayfish

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of sites in the United Kingdom in which the American Signal crayfish, Pacifartacus Leniusulus, is *(a)* present and *(b)* breeds; and what effect its presence has had on the native British white clawed crayfish. [40381]

Mr. Baldry: American signal crayfish are widespread in England, predominantly south of a line between the Wash and the Bristol Channel, and also in parts of Wales. There are no known populations of signal crayfish in Scotland or in Northern Ireland. Many populations of native British white clawed crayfish have been displaced by the larger, more aggressive signal crayfish which breed and grow more quickly. They have also been affected by the fungal disease known as crayfish plague, which can be carried by signal crayfish.

Woodland (North Yorkshire)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what acreage of woodlands in North Yorkshire was owned by the Government in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1996; [38930]

(2) if he will list the *(a)* name, *(b)* location, *(c)* acreage and *(d)* date of exchange of contracts of each area of woodland (i) sold and (ii) bought by the Government in

North Yorkshire since 1979; and if he will state in relation to each sale whether the new owner permits public access to that land; [38931]

(3) if he will list the *(a)* name, *(b)* location and *(c)* acreage of each area of Government-owned woodland in North Yorkshire which is currently up for sale. [38932]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* The subjects of the question relate to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. Gordon Cowie, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Gordon M. Cowie to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 14 October 1996:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your Questions about Forestry Commission land in North Yorkshire. (38930) (38931) (38932)

The Forestry Commission disposals programme commenced in July 1981 and therefore information is only available from that date. In 1981, the Forestry Commission owned 26,988 ha of land in North Yorkshire, while the current figure in 1996 is 22,060 ha.

To answer your question on particular sales and purchases in North Yorkshire I enclose the following information:-

Annex A—a list of land sold since 1981

Annex B—details of the one area acquired since 1981

Annex C—a list of land currently for sale, either on the Open Market or by Negotiation

The arrangements for Continued Public Access were only introduced in October 1991 and only two sales, highlighted in Annex A, have been sold subject to access agreements.

Annex A: Forestry Commission cases sold in North Yorkshire from July 1981 to date

Year sold	*Name of property*	*Location grid refernece*	*Area (ha)*
1981	Crooked Hill North Bank	SE542902	49.0
1982	Brafferton Spring	SE455715	95.0
	New Park Plantations	SE551622	33.0
	Scotton Banks	SE332579	22.2
1983	Big Ings Wood	SE555680	8.5
	Broxa Moor and Harwood Dale	SE960980	65.0
	Clark Wood	SE449749	30.0
	Flask (land at)	NZ935006	1.0
	Grass Wood	SD986655	65.4
	Kildale (land at)	NZ600107	4.0
	Knots Plantation	SE121702	4.4
	Riffa Wood	SE254470	19.1
	Westow and Storth Wood	SE478867	14.8
1984	Birch Hall Cott Grazings	SE928925	2.0
	Bishopwood Main Line Diversion	SE550335	3.3
	Burnt Yates Wood	SE235608	9.2
	Flamborough Rigg (land at)	SE789922	8.0
	Hawkshaw Gill and Clark's Carrwood	SE182633	65.4
	Jackal Wood	SE253939	6.2
	Juniper and Potgate Woods	SE278748	13.0
	Leppington Wood	SE768616	8.6
	Peep O'Day Woods	SE521721	4.9
	Scardale Package (pt)	SE895734	52.9
	Sherburn and Butterwick Whins	SE972727	17.0
	Southwold	SE875711	31.5
	Swinton Estate (pt)	SE180801	286.0
	Swinton Estate (pt)	SE180801	183.3
	Swinton Estate and Presidents Wood	SE180801	459.1
	The Avenue	SE452725	6.5
	Warren Slack	SE990743	17.0
	West Moor Plantation	SE449732	2.9
	West Wood	SE135680	8.5
	Wragby Plantation	NZ930000	21.0
1985	Hornby Leasehold	SE223934	16.1
	Ingleby Greenhow, Church	NZ579063	1.6
	Levisham Block	SE822904	68.5
	Moor Covert Plantation	SE780657	11.3
	Newton Mulgrave	NZ775137	43.3
	Oxdale, Dargo and Laurel	SE885837	18.2
	Raindale Head	SE802934	2.5
	Scardale Package (pt)	SE895734	193.2
1986	Broxa: Spring Wood East and West	SE974930	17.5
	Crookrise/Gargrave (pt)	SD978541	7.1
	Crookrise/Gargrave 1, 2, 3, 5, 6	SD975553	243.9
	Crookrise/Gargrave Lot 4	SD988555	3.0
	Croomdale Plantation	SE945671	33.0
	Everley Banks Plantation	SE974930	34.5
	Fewler Gate Wood	SE974930	11.6
	Irton Moor, Whin Coverty	SE996869	39.0
	Little Beck Wood	NZ880046	16.2
	Quarry Wood	SE248691	2.7
	Stapleton Park	SE499183	28.0
	Staxton Brow	TA020785	38.0
	Sunny Bank	SE239696	9.3
	Wilstrop Wood	SE490540	24.7
1987	E and W Belts and Ramshaw Quarry	SE149841	27.8
	Elslack	SD940481	66.5
	Harewood Whin	SE540522	8.6
	Longside Plantation	SE129721	88.5
	Witton Fell	SE138848	107.0
1988	Grinkle Park (pt)	NZ750164	134.5
	Grinkle Park (pt)	NZ764179	35.8
	Skipster Hagg Wood	SE731866	10.0
1989	Arden, Hawnby and Bilsdale	SE550893	225.0
	Back Plantation	SE030513	13.4
	Birk Bank Wood	SE560864	14.9
	Black Beck Wood	SE930920	8.7
	Bullen Wood	SE457383	17.1
	Camblesforth Woodlands	SE624271	43.8
	Constable Burton	SE145915	74.3
	Elleron Lodge, Flamborough	SE790920	13.6
	Hollin Head and Piney Moor	SE274735	29.9
	Pits Wood	SE965947	9.0
	Plumpton Wood	SE540886	7.7
1990	There were no cases sold.		
1991	Burnt Gill Plantation	SE610750	11.4
	Darncombe Shelter Belt	SE934905	0.2
	Grimston Woods Lot 1	SE661495	5.0
	Grimston Woods Lot 2	SE661495	24.6
	Grove Wood	SE665723	5.9
	Hambleton Hough	SE555298	1.0
	Hornby Freehold	SE220930	56.1
	Naburn Wood	SE609437	18.0
	Osmotherley Catchment	SE467985	93.4
	Staker Wood	SE557283	4.0
1992	Burnt Plantation	SE232659	3.6
	Fishpond Wood	SE779387	8.1.
	Hebden Wood East and Stripe	SE254661	7.0
	High Plumps and Triangle	SE671584	8.3
	Mirysike Wood	SE933913	2.5
	Moreby Wood (pt)	SE607426	1.0
	Rabbit Hill Plantation	SE236655	1.5
	Wet Car Wood	SE254661	12.5
	White Wood and Backlays	SE937905	53.0

Annex A: Forestry Commission cases sold in North Yorkshire from July 1981 to date

Year sold	Name of property	Location grid refernece	Area (ha)
1993	Arncliffe and Rounton	NZ428030	37.7
	Boltby Grazing and Low Paradise	SE505881	10.2
	Copeland and Deighton	SE523557	6.4
	East Bank Plantation	NZ574003	26.3
	Green Bank Wood	SE259672	4.8
	Hebden and Ellarcar Wood	SE247656	5.1
	Kelfield Wood	SE586395	14.0
	Kirby Sigston Wood	SE423936	25.0
	Longrush	SE591417	12.5
	Low Raindale Land	SE808939	10.4
	Overton Wood	SE545572	47.9
	Red House Wood	SE520570	48.0
1994	Averhams	SE676607	51.8
	Butcher Bank	SE455883	16.0
	Carlow Hill	SE448933	2.8
	Fir Tree Wood	SE569286	10.8
	Gateforth East	SE547285	[1]28.0
	Gateforth West	SE547285	46.6
	Grange Wood, Sproxton	SE616803	8.0
	Lindley Wood	SE217494	40.8
	Mill Wood, Gilling	SE620764	9.1
	Moreby Wood	SE610427	[1]34.0
	Sawley Wood, Lot 1	SE225665	116.5
	Sawley Wood, Lot 2	SE225665	205.0
	Spring Wood	SE444925	2.7
	Toms Wood	SE565282	11.0
	Tunnel Wood	SE571284	4.5
1995	Lodge Plantation	SE651719	8.7
	Raisdale	NZ531107	180.5
	Scackleton Moor	SE655716	35.9
	Slacks Wood	NZ586121	37.8
1996[1]	Bransdale Wood	SE624990	38.5
	Hell Hole—Kilburn	SE521811	48.0
	Lonsdale Plantation	NZ611112	46.0

1. Sold subject to access agreement.
[1] To date.

Annex B: Forestry Commission land acquired from 1981 to date

Year	Name of property	Location grid reference	Area (ha)
1987	Troutsdale (land at)	SE930890	37.0

Annex C: Forestry Commission land currently for sale either on the open market or by negotiation

Name of property	Location grid reference	Area (ha)
Bradley Howl Wood, Cold Kirby	SE541851	25.0
Bransdale Woods, Helmsley	SE613967	201.0
Cottage Wood, Dunnington	SE682518	4.0
Dalby Bush Wood, Terrington	SE635719	36.0
Farm Plantation, Terrington	SE656715	6.0
Glaisdale Woods, Whitby	NZ770030	151.5
Goathland Woods, Whitby	NZ820020	70.0
Hagg Wood, Dunnington	SE683525	43.0
Haxby Plantation, Whitby	NZ899051	50.0
Hayton Woods, Tadcaster	SE446385	51.0
Hazel Wood, Tadcaster	SE440395	56.0
Hazelhead Wood, Helmsley	SE531930	94.0
Howsham Wood, York	SE746640	81.0
Kilburn Thicket, Thirsk	SE526788	12.0
Mill Wood, Terrington	SE644735	24.0
Robsons Spring, Helmsley	SE626813	43.0
Scoreby Wood, Dunnington	SE697517	33.0

Sand-eels

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to assess the impact of industrial fishing for sand-eels along the east coast of the United Kingdom on juvenile stocks of commercial fish species; and if he will make a statement. [39165]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* In 1992 the Scottish Office marine laboratory in Aberdeen hosted a scientific meeting convened by the European Commission which concluded that even a major reduction in the sand-eel fishery was unlikely to produce significant benefits for other commercial fish species. The UK enforcement authorities carry out routine monitoring of the sand-eel fishery in UK waters. This monitoring confirms that there is little by-catch of other commercial species. However, given the scale of the fishery, I have pressed for further scientific research and the introduction of further controls.

Agency Printing Costs

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the agencies for which his Department is responsible indicating for each the costs incurred for printing *(a)* all publications and *(b)* the annual report in the last available year. [38668]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 23 July 1996]:* The agencies for which MAFF is responsible are:

Meat Hygiene Service

Pesticide Safety Directorate

Central Veterinary Laboratory

Veterinary Medicines Directorate

Central Science Laboratory

Agricultural Development Advisory Service

All commission the printing of publications and annual report independently. Chief executives have been asked to respond directly giving the information required.

Letter from Johnston McNiel to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 14 October 1996:

As chief executive of the Meat Hygiene Service your question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food relating to the costs incurred for printing all publications and annual report in the last available year has been passed to me for reply with respect to this executive agency.(38668)

The Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) was launched on 1 April 1995 as an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF). It took over from some 300 local authorities responsibility for enforcement of the hygiene, inspection and welfare at slaughter legislation in licensed meat premises in England, Scotland and Wales.

In the financial year 1995/96 the MHS spent £21,184 on the publication of its Operation Manual. This manual provides an accessible source of guidance, information and instruction to all inspection staff.

All other MHS publications, such as the Agency's Business and Corporate Plans are produced "in house" at the MHS headquarters in York. This office is located within an existing MAFF building. The MHS benefits from a number of the facilities in this building, notably the MAFF reprographic service. The cost for using this service is included in the total charge for the accommodation billed by MAFF."

In 1995/96 the MHS spent £32,148 on the publication of its Annual Report and Accounts.

Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 14 October 1996:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), to your question regarding the costs incurred for printing of publications.[38668]

In the financial year ended 31 March 1996 the total cost incurred by PSD in printing publications was £6,861. Within that total, the printing costs of the 1994/95 Annual Report and Accounts were £6,516.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 14 October 1996:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about printing costs for all VLA publications and the Annual Report in the last available year. [38668]

The VLA was established on 1 October 1995, from the merger of the existing Central Veterinary Laboratory with the Veterinary Investigation Service, which was part of the State Veterinary Service.

For the financial year 1994/95 for the old CVL, the total printing costs for all publications produced by the Agency was £20,332. Printing costs for the Annual Report and Accounts were £1,000.

Letter from John Fitzgerald to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 14 October 1994:

In the absence of the Chief Executive on business, I have been asked by the Minister to reply on behalf of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate to your question about the costs incurred for printing as this is an operational matter for which the Chief Executive is responsible. [38668]

In the financial year 1995/96 the Veterinary Medicines Directorate spent £15,704 on printing of the Annual Report and Accounts, and £32,582 on all other publications.

Letter from Professor P. I. Stanley to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 14 October 1996:

PRINTING COSTS

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your question about the costs incurred for printing a) all publications and b) the annual report in the last available year in respect of his Central Science Laboratory (CSL) Agency, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible. [38668]

In 1995/96 the cost of printing all publications was approximately £83K. The cost of printing CSL's 1995/96 Annual Report & Accounts was £7K which will fall in the 1996/97 financial year.

Letter from Phillip Needham to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 14 October 1996:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply direct to your Parliamentary Question in which you ask for the costs incurred for printing (a) all publications and (b) the annual report in the last available year. [38668]

The total cost incurred for printing ADAS corporate publications in 1995/96 was £73,935 which includes the annual report and accounts at a cost of £800.

Forestry Commission Land

Ms Lynne: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the plots of Forestry Commission land in Lancashire which are *(a)* currently for sale and *(b)* being considered for sale; and in each case (i) how large the plot of land is, (ii) what consultation will be made in advance of each sale and (iii) how many representations he has received for and against each sale; [39803]

(2) if he will list the plots of land which have been sold by the Forestry Commission in Lancashire in each of the last five years; and in each case *(a)* how large the plot of land was, *(b)* what consultation was made in advance of the sale and *(c)* how many representations he received for and against the sale. [39804]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 24 July 1996]:* The subjects of the questions relate to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. Gordon Cowie, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Gordon M. Cowie to Ms Liz Lynn, dated 14 October 1996:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your Questions about Forestry Commission land in Lancashire. [39803 and 39804]

In answer to your questions I enclose the following information:-

Annex A: a list of land sold since 1991

Annex B: a list of land currently for sale, either on the Open Market or by Negotiation, or currently being considered for sale.

All the properties listed were notified in the Estates Gazette and the local authority has been advised of our intention to sell. No representations have been received, either for or against any of these sales.

Annex B: Forestry commission land currently for sale either on the open market or by negotiation in Lancashire

Year	*Name of property*	*Area (ha)*
1996	Tythe Barn Plantation, Carnforth	8.0

Forestry commission land currently being considered for sale in Lancashire

Year	*Name of property*	*Area (ha)*
1996	Longmire	14.0
	Lythe Brow	17.0

Annex A: Forestry commission cases sold in Lancashire from 1991 to date

Year	*Name of property*	*Area (ha)*
1991	Whitewell Estate, Bowland	130.5
1992	No sales	—
1993	No sales	—
1994	No sales	—
1995	Ashpots and Hollinshead	32.0
	Havelock Woods	6.0
	Long Ellers Wood	2.0
	Scroggs Wood	2.0
1996	No sales to date	—

Meat and Bone Meal

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all legislation covering the storage of meat and bone meal made from cattle slaughtered under the 30-months scheme. [39120]

Mrs. Browning *[holding reply sent on 24 July 1996]:* The storage of meat and bone meal after it leaves rendering plants is covered by the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Environmental Protection (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991 (SI 1991 No. 2839), the Waste

Management Licensing Regulations 1994 as amended (SI 1994 No. 1056 and 1996/1279) and the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Order 1996 (SI 1996 No. 2007).

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) for how long he estimates meat and bone meal made from cattle slaughtered under the 30-months scheme will be stored in each of the facilities currently in use for this purpose in the United Kingdom; [39122]

(2) for how long he estimates meat and bone meal made from cattle slaughtered under the 30–months scheme will be stored at Woodbury Salterton in Devon. [39121]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 24 July 1996]:* The Government are exploring all practicable options for the disposal of meat and bone meal derived from cattle slaughtered under the over 30-month scheme, including incineration and burning for energy recovery. The period for which meat and bone meal is stored will be dependent upon a number of factors, not least the final disposal route chosen, and this has not yet been decided.

Land Development

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was in each year from 1988 to 1995, inclusive, and broken down by agricultural land grade, the area of land proposed for developments of over 20 hectares in size in respect of which his Department has *(a)* not objected and *(b)* objected. [39195]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 24 July 1996]:* Local planning authorities are required to consult the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about any development proposal which does not accord with the development plan and which involves, or is likely to lead to, the loss of more than 20 hectares of agricultural land of grades 1, 2 or 3a. The information requested is shown in the table.

Year[1]	Total agricultural area (hectares)	Area by ALC grade (hectares)[2]						
		1	*2*	*3a*	*3b*	*3*[3]	*4*	*5*
No MAFF objection								
1988	16,762	634	1,642	4,052	6,882	2,356	1,135	61
1989	21,256	782	2,553	4,612	5,647	497	7,051	114
1990	30,360	171	4,409	4,464	7,628	11,061	2,207	420
1991	24,886	348	3,360	3,724	6,391	9,192	1,738	133
1992	13,472	63	1,030	2,042	5,628	3,338	1,222	149
1993	9,562	59	663	2,077	4,072	1,782	878	31
1994	9,966	64	674	2,305	4,832	1,244	385	462
1995	10,671	92	1,168	2,609	5,363	608	646	185
MAFF objection								
1988	2,268	110	177	671	1,203	0	34	73
1989	1,266	82	326	459	265	0	132	2
1990	1,231	96	388	474	272	0	1	0
1991	1,398	155	451	560	158	48	26	0
1992	2,141	16	694	844	550	24	12	1
1993	1,962	74	502	841	413	105	27	0
1994	1,694	85	435	772	334	16	48	4
1995	1,835	78	399	675	445	177	60	1

[1] Records for 1988 to 1992 do not distinguish the stage at which MAFF was consulted: data may therefore be recorded more than once.
[2] A development proposal referred to MAFF may include land of grades other than 1, 2 and 3a.
[3] Not defined between grades 3a and 3b.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions ministerial conference and meeting rooms in the parliamentary estate have been booked in his name, or that of other Ministers in his Department, for meetings with Conservative hon. Members immediately preceding questions to his Department in the current parliamentary Session. [39522]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Ministers have meetings with hon. Members as and when necessary to discuss a wide variety of matters. Records are not kept which would enable the distinction on the type of meeting to be drawn.

Departmental Vehicles

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of traffic violations involving departmental vehicles, the nature of the violations, and the total amount of fines arising from those violations, in each year since 1986. [39312]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 24 July 1996]:* This information is not available. Central records of traffic violations are not kept and drivers of official vehicles are usually expected to meet the cost of fines resulting from traffic violations themselves.

ENVIRONMENT

Advertisements

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the *(a)* organisations and *(b)* individuals who responded to the consultation paper of 14 February, concerning outdoor advertisement controls; [40251]

(2) how many of the responses received to the consultation paper concerning outdoor advertisement controls were opposed to the proposals to abolish areas of special advertisement control; [40252]

(3) when he plans to make a decision on the proposals to abolish areas of special advertisement controls; [40253]

(4) what plans he has for a further period of consultation on the proposals to abolish areas of special advertisement control; [40254]

(5) what plans he has to revise the proposals to abolish areas of special advertisement control. [40255]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The matter is still under consideration. When we announce our decision, copies of all the responses to the consultation paper will be made available in the Library.

Climate Change

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to follow up the recommendation on page 157 of his Department's review of the potential effect of climate change in the United Kingdom in relation to local strategic planning and climate change. [40067]

Mr. Clappison: The review of the potential effects of climate change in the United Kingdom in July looked at the potential impacts of climate change and provided an evaluation of possible adaptive responses. We are considering how to build on this, for example by co-ordinating a programme of integrated assessments of the impacts of climate change on sectors and regions in the UK.

Progress is also being made by more than 300 local authorities, in partnership with all sectors of their communities, to develop local strategies for sustainable development through the local agenda 21 initiative. This includes round table discussions on planning, greening the local economy and transport and sustainability.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking in respect of the conclusions on page 51 of his Department's review of the potential effects of climate change in the United Kingdom in relating to subsidence risks to buildings. [40068]

Mr. Clappison: My Department is considering the implications of the conclusions of the review of the potential impacts of climate change in the United Kingdom. The Building Regulations 1991 already require buildings to be constructed so that ground movement caused by swelling, shrinkage or freezing of the subsoil will not impair the stability of any part of the building. The potential for such ground movement depends on the nature of the soil and its response to changes in moisture content due to climatic conditions and/or the water demand of trees in the vicinity of the building. Guidance is available from relevant British standards, Institution of Structural Engineers, Building Research Establishment and National House Building Council standard, which generally recommend simple and inexpensive tests for assessing the soil properties and advise on the means of identifying and dealing with the problem, depending on the type of building construction. If buildings on shrinkable clay are constructed in accordance with this guidance, there should not be any significant increase in risk on account of an increase in the number of droughty summers and wetter winters.

Insurance costs associated with swelling and shrinkable ground have generated significant costs related to past developments. However, increasing awareness of the problem and the provision of adequate foundations should enable new development to avoid these costs. My Department has already funded considerable research on the problem which provides the basis for guidance. In the light of that guidance and the existing building control system, directives are unlikely to be necessary, but the research and its dissemination in order to increase awareness will be continued and will take into account amy impact that climate change may have on it.

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how may women from ethnic minorities are employed by his Department and its agencies; at what grade; and what measures he has taken to encourage the *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* employment and *(c)* promotion of women from ethnic minorities within his Department and its agencies. [39899]

Sir Paul Beresford: The number of women, by grade, from ethnic minorities employed by the Department and its agencies as at 1 July 1996 was a total of 191 at the following levels or their equivalents: two senior executive officers; 11 higher executive officers; 24 executive officers; 101 administrative officers and 53 administrative assistants.

Measures to encourage recruitment, employment and promotion of women from ethnic minorities have been taken under the Department's action plan for people of ethnic minority origin published in 1991, and a similar action plan for women published in 1993. They include: providing a range of equal opportunities training for managers and staff, including positive action management courses for women only and training on developing potential for ethnic minorities only; publicising staff vacancies in specialist recruitment publications featuring role models, to help encourage minority group representation; participation in the Windsor Fellowship scheme, providing vacation work experience for ethnic minority undergraduates; membership of a mentoring consortium led by the East London university to contribute to the development of ethnic minority students by establishing clear links with role models in employment; ensuring that wherever possible a woman serves on promotion and selection panels and that all such panel members are trained to take account of equal opportunities issues; monitoring and analysing success rates by gender and ethnic origin the processes of recruitment, internal postings scheme, annual performance and promotability markings, performance pay and bonuses; identifying any barriers to progress and enhancing the processes to ensure equality of opportunity; the appointment of equal opportunity liaison officers in each directorate to help promote equality of opportunity in the workplace and reflect local needs; annual reporting by the equal opportunities unit to the department's management board, and to all staff, covering the progress of all equal opportunities initiatives.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many members of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee are qualified ecologists; and what plans he has to strengthen the ecological expertise of this committee. [39920]

Mr. Clappison: Of the 13 members of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, nine have qualifications in earth of life sciences. The other four have backgrounds in

farming and broadcasting. On 1 September, two new members of the joint committee took up their appointments. Professors Crawley and Heal bring broad ranging expertise on national and international nature conservation issues to the committee.

Health and Safety

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to extend health and safety protection at work. [39994]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government have no plans, at present, to extend the application of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and related legislation on health and safety at work.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the number of people, in each region who are exposed at work *(a)* to noise at levels which can permanently damage their hearing and *(b)* to ergonomic problems which can permanently damage their health. [40472]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is not available in the form requested.

The Health and Safety Executive estimates that around 500,000 people are exposed to noise at work of above 90 dB(A), the level at which employers are legally required to reduce exposure and provide hearing protection.

There are no figures on the number exposed to ergonomic problems at work, either nationally or regionally. Most such problems can readily be put right and do not cause permanent damage to health if appropriate action is taken.

Riparian Surveys

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to promote an extension of river corridor surveys to a full riparian zone survey; and if he will make a statement. [40124]

Mr. Clappison: Between 1989 and 1995, the former National Rivers Authority carried out river corridor surveys along 30,000 km of river in England and Wales. The primary purpose of such surveys is to map, in detail, habitat and vegetation of the channel and banks and to identify features of special interest which require protection. The surveys also record riparian features and land use in a 50 m strip either side of the watercourse.

The Environment Agency is now developing the river habitat survey system for assessing the habitat quality of rivers and streams based on their physical structure. RHS provides a classification system according to river segment type and a comparison with the predicted state of an unmodified channel. The methodology reflects channel features, vegetation in and around the channel, trees, land use, alien plant species and wildlife. An interim report with preliminary results was issued in March. A full report with final results form the period 1994–96 will be published in May 1997.

Local Government Finance

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, by authority, the surplus achieved on trading accounts for the financial year 1994–95 for *(a)* refuse collection, *(b)* street cleaning, *(c)* building cleaning, *(d)* school and welfare catering, *(e)* other catering, *(f)* vehicle maintenance, *(g)* ground maintenance and *(h)* sports and leisure management services delivered by local authorities' direct labour or service organisations in England under the terms of the Local Government Act 1988. [40170]

Sir Paul Beresford: A detailed list of the surpluses achieved for these services for the financial year 1994–95 has been placed in the Library of the House.

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library in machine-readable form a table showing for each authority for each year from 1979–80 to 1996–97 the amount that each authority was deemed to need to spend in cash and in real terms for the purposes of distributing rate support grant; to what extent the figures are comparable, taking account of *(a)* changes in functions of local authorities, *(b)* abolition of the Greater London council, the Inner London education authority and metropolitan counties, *(c)* the local government review and *(d)* changed arrangements for (i) the assessment of needs, (ii) for the payment of the needs element of the rate support grant and (iii) precepting arrangements; if he will indicate for each authority on a comparable basis of ranking the assessed needs in each year on the basis (1) the percentage of total local government spending and (2) the amount assessed needs per head of population; and if he will make a statement about the needs of *(A)* Liverpool and *(B)* Westminster over the period. [40157]

Sir Paul Beresford: Information on the amount which each local authority was deemed to need to spend for the purposes of distributing rate support grant and revenue support grant has been placed in the Library as printed tables and in machine readable form. The data consist of damped needs assessment for 1979–80 and 1980–81, grant-related expenditure assessments for 1981–82 to 1989–90, and standard spending assessments for 1990–91 to 1996–97. Information has been provided in cash terms, in real terms, as an amount per head and as a percentage of the total needs assessment for all English authorities. The figures in real terms are based on the gross domestic product deflator.

The information includes, for 1992–93 and later years, figures recalculated so as to be comparable to those for the year immediately following. These adjusted figures take account of changes in function and geographical responsibility, but not changes in data, methodology, or the national totals. Adjusted figures are not available for earlier years.

The damped needs assessments of 1979–80 for Liverpool and Westminster included allowance for the needs of the authorities which precepted on the two cities. In 1996–97, the needs of precepting authorities are calculated separately. For comparability, therefore, the 1996–97 figures are the total standard spending assessments per head of both the cities and the authorities which precept on them. On this basis, the damped needs assessment for Liverpool in 1979–80 was £327 per head, some 33 per cent. below that for Westminster. In 1996–97, standard spending assessments for the Liverpool area were £1,053 per head, some 25 per cent. below those for the Westminster area. Thus the Liverpool area now has

standard spending assessments £111 per head greater than if it had continued to have an assessment 33 per cent. below Westminster's, as it did in 1979–80.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the level of greenhouse gas emissions in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1990. [40245]

Mr. Clappison: Estimates of the United Kingdom's emissions of the main greenhouse gases for 1990 and 1994 were published in the 18th "Digest of Environmental Statistics":

	Estimated emissions (million tonnes of gas)	
	1990	*1994*
Carbon dioxide (CO_2)	583	544
Methane (CH_4)	4.44	3.88
Nitrous oxide (N_2O)	0.11	0.09
Nitrogen oxides (NO_x)	2.71	2.22
Carbon monoxide (CO)	6.42	4.86
Non-methane volatile organic compounds	2.28	2.03

1994 is the most recent year for which we have a published inventory of the United Kingdom's emissions of greenhouse gases. Carbon dioxide emissions are provisionally estimated to have been 548 million tonnes in 1995.

These figures were calculated by the national environmental technology centre using the methodology developed by the intergovernmental panel on climate change.

Pneumoconiosis and Asbestosis Claims

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 23 July, *Official Report*, column *312*, on cases settled under the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) (Payments of Claim) Amendment Regulations, if he will give a breakdown of the 75 per cent. of payments which were not for pneumoconiosis or asbestosis. [40171]

Sir Paul Beresford: The table provides a breakdown of the 75 per cent. of all cases settled in 1995–96 under the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) (Payments of Claims) Amendment Regulations which were not for pneumoconiosis or asbestosis;

Disease	*Percentage of claims*[1]	*Average age*	*Average payment £*
Mesothelioma	74	61	14,506
Bilateral diffuse pleural thickening	17	61	8,749
Primary carcinoma of the lung (accompanied by asbestosis or bilateral diffuse pleural thickening)	8	59	7,509
Byssinosis	1	71	4,506

[1] Represents the percentage of claims in relation to the 75 per cent. of all claims paid for diseases other than pneumoconiosis or asbestosis.

Waste Recycling

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the percentage of waste which was recycled by each local authority in each of the last three years. [40416]

Mr. Clappison: Following a commitment in the White Paper on waste "Making Waste Work", my Department launched in September a major new survey to collect data from local authorities on municipal waste arisings and waste treatment options, from which recycling rates may be derived. The results for 1995–96 are expected early in 1997, and the survey will be repeated annually in the spring thereafter. This initiative should significantly improve both the quantity and quality of data available on municipal waste management.

Separately, information on local authority recycling rates has been collected both by the Audit Commission, under its local authority performance indicators initiative, and by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountancy. Copies of the Audit Commission publications are available in the Library.

Water Pollution

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) of 26 January, *Official Report*, columns *408–12*, on infringements, prosecutions, offences and pollution incidents in the water industry, if he will update the information provided. [40409]

Mr. Clappison: As a result of the 1995 technical audits of water companies, the drinking water inspectorate considered taking enforcement action against water companies in England and Wales in 146 instances. This was a reduction on previous years.

Thames Water Utilities Ltd. pleaded guilty at Kingston crown court on 31 July 1996 to four charges under section 70 of the Water Industry Act 1991 for the offence of supplying water unfit for human consumption and was fined £80,000 plus costs of £9,800. The prosecution was brought following an investigation by the drinking water inspectorate of an incident in which 84,300 consumers in parts of Tooting, Wandsworth and Wimbledon were supplied with dirty water.

The tables show the information on water pollution and water abstraction infringements and prosecutions, for incidents where prosecution took place after 26 January 1996. In all cases convictions were made.

Water pollution offences

Company/date of infringement	*Date of prosecution*
North West	
06.05.95	07.03.96
Southern	
12.09.95	20.02.96
01.11.95	14.03.96
20.08.95	19.03.96
30.10.05	19.06.96
22.11.95	19.6.96
06.08.95	31.07.96
12.11.95	01.08.96

Water pollution offences

Company/date of infringement	*Date of prosecution*
South West	
07.06.95	28.02.96
Thames	
05.02.96	21.07.96
20.08.95	16.04.96
22.11.95	01.05.96
Northumbrian	
28.09.95	15.03.96
Anglian	
[1]—	05.02.96
[1]—	01.03.96
01.07.95	03.04.96
15.10.95	15.04.96
[1]—	01.07.96
Yorkshire	
01.08.93	02.02.96
12.07.94	02.02.96
Severn Trent	
24.11.95	18.03.96
01.06.94	20.06.96
25.06.95	05.08.96

[1] Exact date of infringement not known.

Water abstraction offences

Company/date of infringement	*Date of prosecution*
Severn Trent	
19.07.95	05.02.96
27.06.95–29.06.95	14.02.96
01.01.95–28.06.95	03.06.96
30.04.95–16.05.95	03.06.96
14.05.96–27.05.95	03.06.96
27.06.95	03.06.96
27.06.95–01.07.95	03.06.96
29.06.95–14.10.95	03.06.96
04.08.95	04.06.96
31.03.95–30.09.95	
04.08.95	04.06.96
31.03.95	
Midland	
07.08.95	06.08.96
07.08.95	06.08.96
Anglian	
31.07.95	09.02.96
07.07.95	05.03.96
21.06.95	14.03.96

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the reasons for which prosecuting authorities have withdrawn prosecutions of alleged polluters of water resources since the Water Resources Act 1991 came into force. [40375]

Mr. Clappison: Prosecution in relation to water resources pollution offences is a matter for the Environment Agency.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what meetings he has held with *(a)* the (i) chairman and (ii) chief executive of the Environment Agency and *(b)* the director of the drinking water inspectorate since the Environment Act 1995 came into force to discuss how effective the prosecution measures available to the responsible authorities in regard to water pollution incidents have proved to date. [40395]

Mr. Clappison: There have been no specific discussions with my right hon. Friend of these issues. Pollution control policies and their effectiveness frequently figure in discussion between the Department and the agency. The Environment Agency is developing policies on enforcement and prosecution following, amongst other things, the changes made by the Environment Act 1995 on the use in legal proceedings of evidence from samples.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the consultation on the water control of pollution regulations. [40406]

Mr. Clappison: A total of 27 responses have been made to the Department's consultation paper "Water: Control of Pollution Regulations" issued on 22 August. The regulations will be made shortly.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what monitoring is conducted (i) by his Department and (ii) on behalf of his Department and agencies which report to his Department on the effects of the concentration of copper deposits in drinking water supplies dormant for periods of over six hours. [40474]

Mr. Clappison: The Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 require water companies to take a specified number of samples for analysis for copper each year from consumers' taps in randomly selected properties in each of their water supply zones. The specified number is between one and 24 samples per year depending on the size of the zone. The samples collected are the first litre of water drawn off by the sampler. This water will have been in contact with any pipework, including copper pipework, for varying periods including up to six hours and possibly more.

The results are provided annually to, and are audited by, the drinking water inspectorate. In 1995 the 31 water companies in England and Wales analysed 10,616 samples for copper. All samples were within the standard in the regulations of 3,000 micrograms per litre.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each occasion, specifying dates and locations, on which cryptosporidium has been reported in domestic water supplies in the last five years. [40346]

Mr. Clappison: The water companies in England and Wales are required to report all incidents in which water quality might be affected. On cryptosporidium the notification can relate to either the detection of cryptosporidium oocysts in treated water, or to an increase of the illness cryptosporidiosis in the community, or both. The transmission of the illness occurs in a number of ways and often through contact with animals. One recent outbreak of cryptosporidiosis was found to be associated with the failure of a milk pasteurisation plant.

All incidents are investigated fully by the drinking water inspectorate. As cryptosporidiosis can be transmitted in many ways, the source of any outbreak has to be established through epidemiology. A case of South

West Water Services Ltd. allegedly supplying water unfit for human consumption because of cryptosporidium is currently before the courts.

Notifications of events involving cryptosporidium are listed below under four headings. It should be noted that not all notifications become confirmed as incidents.

Cryptosporidium oocysts detected in treated water but no reported increase of cryptosporidiosis in the community

Water company area	*Date*	*Location*
Yorkshire Water	19 December 1991	Redmires
Southern Water	19 March 1992	Broadfields Water Treatment Works (WTW)
Severn Trent Water	20 August 1992	Fairholmes WTW
Southern Water	8 September 1992	Steyning WTW
Southern Water	22 October 1992	Testwood WTW
South West Water	29 December 1992	Broomhill WTW
Yorkshire Water	5 January 1995	Huby WTW
Yorkshire Water	16 March 1995	Fixby WTW
Essex and Suffolk	30 March 1995	Ormsby WTW
Yorkshire Water	31 August 1995	Cottingham adit
Yorkshire Water	13 September 1995	Kepwick Springs WTW (in raw water)
South West Water	13 September 1995	Parracombe WTW
Yorkshire Water	15 January 1996	Kepwick Springs WTW
Cambridge Water	30 May 1996	Duxford/Linton
Mid Kent Water	3 July 1996	Burham WTW
Southern Water	3 July 1996	Burham WTW

An increase in cryptosporidiosis in the community but oocysts not detected in treated water

Water company area	*Date*	*Location*
Southern Water	28 December 1990	Thanet area
North West Water	5 May 1992	West Cumbria
North West Water	27 March 1992	Barrow-in-Furness
North West Water	14 December 1992	Warrington
Northumbrian	15 June 1993	Sherburn
North West	April 94	Chorley

Both oocysts detected in treated water an increase of cryptosporidiosos in the community

Water company area	*Date*	*Location*
Yorkshire Water	13 November 1992	Bingley and Shipley
South West Water	12 August 1995	Torbay/ Littlehempston

Incidents still under investigation

Water company area	*Date*	*Location*
Wessex Water	April 1993	Poole
Yorkshire Water	11 June 1993	Gilstead
Yorkshire Water	5 January 1996	Elvington WTW
Yorkshire Water	10 January 1996	Elvington WTW
North East	25 January 1996	Sunderland
Yorkshire Water	21 March 1996	Tophill
North West Water	29 April 1996	The Wirral
South West Water	29 May 1996	Littlehempston
South West Water	27 June 1996	Crown Hill WTW

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many water pollution incidents in the categories used by the Environment Agency, comprising *(a)* major, *(b)* significant, *(c)* minor and *(d)* unsubstantiated have taken place each year since the Water Resources Act 1991 came into force; and what remedial action has been taken to clean up contaminated water sources. [40376]

Mr. Clappison: The number of reported water pollution incidents in each year since the Water Resources Act, broken down into major, significant, minor and unsubstantiated are as follows:

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Major	388	331	229	199
Significant	[1]22,943	6,768	6,567	2,194
Minor		18,200	18,619	21,070
Unsubstantiated	8,342	8,997	9,876	12,427

[1] The figures for this year are not broken down into "significant" and "minor" incidents.

The classification system used by the National Rivers Authority and now the Environment Agency changed during the period since 1991. In particular "unsubstantiated" incidents were only specifically recorded after 1 January 1995. For previous years the figures are inferred.

The agency is concerned wherever possible to prevent pollution from occurring, using enforcement powers, advice and targeted campaigns to do so. The oil care campaign launched in 1995 has, for example, been successful in reducing the number of oil pollution incidents for the first time since 1991. Remedial action is determined on a case by case basis. The agency has powers to recover costs from polluters for such actions and will, following the introduction of new powers in the Environment Act 1995, be able to require a polluter or potential polluter to clean up or take action to prevent an incident.

Technology Foresight Projects

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what developments have taken place in the prioritised projects on the environment contained in the technology foresight initiative reports since their publication; what new resources have been committed to these projects; and if he will make a statement. [40480]

Mr. Clappison: The Department's science programmes have already identified many of the issues raised by the foresight panels and the steering group and are acting upon them.

As an example, the agriculture, natural resources and the environment foresight panel prioritised the reduction of pollution and energy use through attention to building, urban and transport design. This complements the DOE's aim of fostering sustainable development through the planning system and links with the recommendations of other panels and initiatives that are already in place, including the Secretary of State's quality initiative and the engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council programme, "Towards Sustainable Cities".

Some £40 million of DOE science funding in 1995–96, and 1996–97 are relevant to the environmental priorities identified in the technology foresight reports.

Technology foresight provides an important backdrop to the development of many areas of DOE policy, feeding through into the Department's policy support science and technology programmes, and facilitating the development of links between research areas.

Occupational Ill Health

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people in each region have died from occupational ill health in each of the last 10 years. [40419]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is not available in the form requested. Some categories of occupational ill health can be identified from death certificate details and figures for the last 10 years. These are recorded in table 1.

The number of death certificates mentioning asbestosis or the asbestos-related cancer, mesothelioma, in each of the last 10 years are broken down by region in tables 2 and 3. Figures for other occupationally related lung disease are not readily available by region.

Table 1: Deaths due to occupationally related lung disease, 1985–94

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Pneumoconiosis other than asbestosis	324	337	279	281	318	328	287	274	281	276
Byssinosis	25	29	25	22	25	19	16	21	11	7
Farmer's lung and other occupational allergic alveolitis	7	15	16	9	8	6	8	4	12	10
Mesothelioma	617	704	814	872	909	885	1,011	1,082	1,139	1,235
Asbestosis, excluding death certificates which mention mesothelioma	140	166	143	151	155	164	163	150	172	174
Total	1,113	1,251	1,277	1,335	1,415	1,402	1,485	1,531	1,615	1,702

Source: ONS/GRO(S).

Table 2: Mesothelioma deaths by region, 1985–94

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
North	83	76	91	109	85	72	100	92	113	112
Yorkshire and Humberside	44	52	54	69	80	61	94	85	91	120
North West	75	69	94	97	93	91	122	122	111	126
West Midlands	17	32	32	34	48	46	49	55	74	79
East Midlands	26	33	43	43	45	51	44	68	70	58
South West	54	67	73	80	78	90	106	100	103	93
East Anglia	18	21	29	20	27	26	44	33	39	38
South East (excl. G. London)	131	182	171	190	187	204	201	236	228	297
Greater London	98	80	111	105	120	115	108	113	140	133
Wales	18	29	23	14	26	23	34	43	51	51
Scotland	53	63	93	107	119	106	109	133	119	128
Overseas address	—	—	—	4	1	—	—	2	—	—
Total	617	704	814	872	909	885	1,011	1,082	1,139	1,235

Table 3: Asbestosis deaths, excluding death certificates which also mention mesothelioma, by region, 1985–94

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
North	22	26	33	19	29	33	31	28	35	40
Yorkshire and Humberside	12	18	12	20	19	21	13	10	17	21
North West	20	18	17	14	17	22	20	18	32	28
West Midlands	11	5	4	13	9	10	11	10	5	6
East Midlands	3	5	7	4	5	1	7	5	4	8
South West	7	19	17	8	6	7	11	14	21	16
East Anglia	3	3	3	9	6	1	—	1	1	2
South East (excl. G. London)	19	20	10	13	12	16	8	20	15	14
Greater London	18	27	22	31	24	29	38	24	23	21
Wales	4	10	6	5	9	7	6	7	4	4
Scotland	21	15	12	15	19	17	18	13	14	12
Unknown	21	15	12	15	19	17	18	13	14	12
Total	140	166	143	151	155	164	163	150	172	174

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people have been employed by the HSE in each of the last 10 years; and how many of those have been inspectors. [40447]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Following table shows the number of staff and the number of inspectors employed by the Health and Safety Executive in each of the last 10 years.

Year (1 April)	*Total staff*	*Inspectors*
1987	3,573.00	1,204.50
1988	3,470.00	1,165.00
1989	3,524.50	1,182.50
1990	3,698.00	1,239.00
1991	3,877.00	1,342.00
1992	4,321.00	1,469.50
1993	4,537.50	1,532.00
1994	4,544.50	1,572.50
1995	4,390.80	1,477.60
1996	4,151.00	1,466.00

Figures given are full-time equivalent counts: part timers were counted as half units until 1 April 1995; since then they are countered on the basis of the proportion of a full week that they work.

Sleipner Field

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contact he has had with *(a)* the Norwegian Government and *(b)* the British Geological Survey about the disposal of carbon dioxide in the Sleipneir field. [40449]

Mr. Clappison: The UK has received information on the Sleipner project from Statoil of Norway via an international agreement on greenhouse gases research under the auspices of the International Energy Agency. Officials from my Department have met representatives from the British Geological Survey to discuss their research on the underground disposal of carbon dioxide.

Limestone Pavement Campaign

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance he is giving through his representative, Mr. Neale Oliver, to the Limestone Pavement Campaign, with particular reference to Orton scar. [40450]

Mr. Clappison: The Government welcome the news of the future protection of Orton scar through revocation of the existing planning permission. We will continue to support the limestone pavement action group through our statutory advisors, English Nature and the Countryside Commission, wherever appropriate.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his letter of 23 May, what action he has taken to follow up his initiative to provide alternative materials to limestone to gardeners who wish to make rockeries; and if he will make a statement. [40371]

Mr. Clappison: The Government are content with the protection afforded by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 by means of the designation of sites of special scientific interest and/or limestone pavement orders. It nevertheless fully supports the limestone pavement action group's attempts to raise public awareness, and to highlight alternative materials available to gardeners.

Water Quality

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will investigate the health effects of contamination of the cut-off water supplies to consumers undertaken by water companies. [40475]

Mr. Clappison: Provided that the necessary precautions are taken by the water company, the disconnection of a customer's water supply for non-payment of charges, and subsequent reconnection, has no implications for the quality of water supplied.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what substances other than those covered by schedule 2 to the water supply regulations are tested for in water supplies in each region; and if he will list the date and location of each such test in the last three years. [40360]

Mr. Clappison: The results of the regulatory monitoring for substances covered by schedule 2 of the regulations are provided annually to the drinking water inspectorate. In each of the last three years, more than 3 million tests have been carried out and the percentage of tests complying with the standards in the regulations has improved from 98.9 in 1993 to 99.5 in 1995. Water companies may carry out additional testing for other substances in the light of local circumstances, generally in relation to incidents affecting or threatening to affect drinking water quality. The information is relevant only to individual incidents, and although held by the inspectorate it could not be collated except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he had made of the compliance by drinking water suppliers with the 1985 World Health Organisation guidelines, as amended, on drinking water purity. [40377]

Mr. Clappison: The current UK standards as specified in the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 incorporate the standards of the 1980 EC drinking water directive which in turn were based in many cases on the 1984 World Health Organisation guidelines for drinking water quality. In some cases, the regulations are more stringent than the directive. In 1995, the 31 water companies in England and Wales met the standards in the regulations in 99.5 per cent. of over 3 million tests.

The 1984 World Health Organisation guidelines were amended in 1993. The new guidelines contain a number of more stringent values, the most significant one is the value for lead of 10 micrograms per litre. This value has been included in the proposed revision of the EC drinking water directive published in May 1995. The World Health Organisation value can be regarded as an average but the interpretation of the value in the proposed directive is not clear. In 1995 approximately 20 per cent. of samples taken from consumers' taps exceeded 10 micrograms per litre but these were spot checks and not a measure of average levels. The current standard of 50 micrograms per litre as a maximum is equivalent to an average level of around 20 micrograms per litre. The drinking water inspectorate has recently commissioned a study to estimate the extent

of compliance with, and how much further water treatment and lead pipe replacement might be needed to achieve compliance with various possible interpretations of the proposed new standard and the associated monitoring requirements.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on developments made in the implementation of statutory water quality objectives. [40400]

Mr. Clappison: Last year, the Secretary of State asked the National Rivers Authority to prepare proposals for statutory water quality objectives in a small number of trial river catchments. I understand that the Environment Agency has recently completed a three-month consultation exercise on its draft proposals and is now finalising its recommendations for statutory objectives in eight river catchments. Once the recommendations have been received, they will be the subject of a statutory consultation exercise before a final decision is taken on their implementation.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what level of lead contamination of drinking water has been reported in each region in the last five years; and how much lead piping is still in use in the drinking water distribution systems in each region by *(a)* length and *(b)* bore. [40347]

Mr. Clappison: The total number of samples analysed for lead, and the number and percentage of samples exceeding the lead standard of 50 micrograms per litre in each region for the last five years, is given in the table.

Samples exceeding the standard for lead reported in each region for the period 1991–1995
Data from the compliance data and annual lead returns submitted to the Drinking Water Inspectorate

Region	*North West*	*North East*	*Midlands*	*East*	*Wales*	*South West*	*South East*	*South*
Total number of samples taken for lead during the period	85,402	27,817	34,754	14,224	19,179	14,883	18,012	28,167
Number of samples with lead>50 ug/l	3,611	968	1,748	115	501	539	284	130
Percentage of samples exceeding the standard for lead	4.2	3.5	5.0	0.8	2.6	3.6	1.6	0.5

The number of water supply zones in England and Wales in which the standard for lead has been exceeded has decreased from 25.6 per cent. in 1991 to 18.7 per cent. in 1995. A further improvement is expected in 1996 as a result of most water companies completing during 1995 the installation of treatment plant to reduce plumbosolvency.

Information about the length and bore of lead piping is not held centrally. The length of lead pipe will vary according to the type of property and in most cases is likely to be in the range of 5 to 20 m. The bore of the piping is likely to be between 12 and 18 mm. The table gives the estimated number of properties in each region supplied through lead communication pipes which belong to the water suppliers, with lead supply pipes which belong to the property owner and with lead internal plumbing which also belongs to the property owner.

Properties with lead pipes
Data from the WRc report to the Department of the Environment on 'Economics of Lead Pipe Replacement'(TMU 9030); May 1992

Region	*North West*	*North East*	*Midlands*	*East*	*Wales*	*South West*	*South East*	*South*
Properties with lead communication pipes (per cent. of total properties)	1,752,516 (63 per cent.)	1,433,829 (48 per cent.)	1,505,826 (43 per cent.)	455,114 (27 per cent.)	326,139 (24 per cent.)	403,609 (27 per cent.)	426,705 (20 per cent.)	1,921,101 (40 per cent.)
Properties with lead supply pipes (per cent. of total properties)	1,669,063 (60 per cent.)	1,444,692 (48 per cent.)	1,601,031 (46 per cent.)	480,586 (27 per cent.)	446,788 (34 per cent.)	372,603 (25 per cent.)	420,698 (19 per cent.)	2,488,682 (51 per cent.)
Properties with lead internal plumbing (per cent. of total properties)	2,086,329 (75 per cent.)	1,394,688 (46 per cent.)	1,601,031 (46 per cent.)	152,483 (8 per cent.)	230,402 (26 per cent.)	346,984 (23 per cent.)	379,199 (18 per cent.)	824,425 (17 per cent.)

NB No account of joint services could be taken. Not all water companies were able to provide data on the numbers of properties with lead internal plumbing. Where data were missing, the number of properties with lead internal plumbing is assumed to be equal to the number of properties with lead supply pipes. Regions in all tables are as specified in the WRc report.

This table was based on data collected in 1991. Between 1991 and 1994 the water suppliers replaced nearly half a million lead communication pipes. The numbers on a regional basis are given in the following table.

	Number
North-west	99,887
North-east	57,240
Midlands	99,312
East	47,629
Wales	44,338
South-west	16,233
South-east	23,563
South	56,967
Total	445,169

British Association for the Advancement of Science

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which representatives of his Department attended the 1996 British Association for the Advancement of Science conference in Birmingham; what use his Department has made of the environmental research made public at the annual British Association for the Advancement of Science meeting; and what role his Department plans to take in the dissemination of environmental research results presented at the meeting. [40482]

Mr. Clappison: Professional staff of the Department attend a wide range of scientific conferences which present opportunities to gather timely information or to pursue DOE research programme interests. At this year's British Association for the Advancement of Science conference, a session on water resources was chaired by an inspector from the Department's drinking water inspectorate. Dissemination of results presented is the responsibility of the conference organisers, the principal means being the conference itself.

Water Pollution

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) which bodies holding a discharge consent, other than sewage works, from the former National Rivers Authority or the Environment Agency, currently discharge pollutants under controlled permission to rivers and other water courses in England and Wales; and it he will make a statement on the current status of compliance; [40473]

(2) on how many occasions since the beginning of 1990 discharge consent conditions have applied to *(a)* effluent treatment plants and *(b)* other industrial or commercial operations have been contravened; and what action has been taken in each case to stop the pollution. [40378]

Mr. Clappison: This information is not held centrally. Data on discharge consents, including information on sampling and any enforcement action is available from the pollution control register held at the regional offices of the Environment Agency. The National Rivers Authority, and now the Environment Agency, also publish summary monitoring and compliance reports, the latest being for 1994. In that year, 69 per cent. of trade effluent discharges as defined in the report, were compliant with the terms of their consents. The report for 1995 is in preparation.

Trees

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe report on the health of trees in Europe, published on 5 September, with particular reference to its evaluation of trees in the United Kingdom. [40287]

Mr. Clappison: The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe report draws on an annual survey of the conditions of forest trees conducted by the Forestry Commission.

The latest report records that the condition of trees in the United Kingdom in 1995 was better than the average for countries in the North Atlantic region of Europe. There were no major changes in crown condition compared to 1994 for oak, Norway spruce, Sitka spruce or Scots pine but, as in other countries, there was a marked deterioration in the condition of beech which was a natural effect of a heavy seeding year.

Shortheld Tenancy Rents

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the growth of assured shorthold tenancy rents over the next five years. [40299]

Mr. Clappison: None. Landlords are free to charge market rents. Research commissioned by my Department last year suggested that assured shorthold tenancy rents have reached a stage where rental yields are in equilibrium with the first-time buyer market. This would imply that such rents are likely to move broadly in line with house prices over the medium term. Recent projections of house price movements do not suggest substantial increases in assured shorthold tenancy rents.

Environmental Information

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the application of the Environmental Information Regulations 1992 to private companies. [40345]

Mr. Clappison: The Environmental Information Regulations 1992 apply to private bodies and persons with responsibilities for the environments which are either carrying out the functions of a public administration or which are under public control, which might include control conferred by statute, contracts or other means that would create the possibility of exercising decisive influence.

Management Information System for Ministers

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how may copies of the annual departmental MINIS returns have been *(a)* purchased from and *(b)* distributed by his Department since the returns were first made public; when it was decided to discontinue the public release for sale of the MINIS 1996 returns; and what announcement was made on the discontinuation of the report's publication. [40478]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department does not have figures available for all the years since MINIS was first made public, but can provide figures for the last two years; these are in the table.

	Minis 15 (1994-95)		*Minis 16 (1995-96)*	
	Distributed[1]	*Sold*	*Distributed*	*Sold*
Principal Establishment and Finance Officer	70	3	95	5
Local Government and Planning	69	5	95	7
Housing and Construction	74	3	95	5
Environment Protection Group	80	6	95	11

	Minis 15 (1994-95) Distributed[1]	Sold	Minis 16 (1995-96) Distributed	Sold
Cities and Countryside Group	71	6	95	8
Legal	73	3	95	5
Government Offices	82	3	[2]—	[2]—

[1] Distributed is the number of copies that were printed and issues within DOE, House of Lords, House of Commons, Environment Committee and other Government Departments.
[2] In 1995–96 a separate MINIS exercise was undertaken by Government Offices and their MINIS plans were published in GO MINIS 1.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State decided earlier in the year not to publish MINIS 17 documents formally since the costs of the exercise were not justified by the low volume of sales and the fact that the Department's new annual report now sets out the main achievements and forward expenditure plans of the constituent parts of the Department.

The decision not to publish MINIS documents formally was not announced as unbound copies are still available on request.

Asbestos

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by number and category imported asbestos-based products; and if he will make a statement. [40328]

Mr. Clappison: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has to require asbestos-based products to be permanently marked as such. [40327]

Mr. Clappison: The marking of asbestos products is already covered by the Asbestos Products (Safety) Regulations 1985 as amended. These regulations require that asbestos and all products containing the mineral should be marked as such using a specified label. The label may be printed directly on to the product, attached to it or attached to is packaging.

Air Pollution

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of the reduction in toxic emissions and other pollutants listed in the pilot environmental accounts published in August is attributable to *(a)* a reduction in economic activity and *(b)* implementation of clean technologies. [40340]

Mr. Clappison: There are a number of sources of information on the sources of, and on past and predicted trends in, emissions of the pollutants listed in the pilot environmental accounts. These include the "Chemical Release Inventory", published by HMIP—now the Environment Agency—the "National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory"—AEA Technology—the Department of the Environment's "Digest of Environmental Statistics" and the draft "National Air Quality Strategy". It is not, however, possible to disaggregate this information in such a way as to be able to attribute the reduction in pollutants to different causes, such as economic activity, the application of cleaner technologies, changing business practices or other factors.

Asthma

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the impact of the asthma awareness campaign initiated by the Health and Safety Executive on the incidence of cases of occupational asthma. [40417]

Sir Paul Beresford: The HSE's "Breathe Freely" campaign ran from April 1994 to April 1995. It is too early to expect to see any change in the incidence of occupational asthma, given the variable latency period associated with this disease. However, HSE will review data in the incidence of occupational asthma to see what insight they might provide into the success of the campaign.

Global Environmental Research Strategy

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the launch of the UK national strategy for global environmental research; which United Kingdom research institutions will benefit from the strategy; what additional resources have been committed in support of the strategy; and what attempts have been made to publicise the existence of and prospective benefits arising from the strategy. [40398]

Mr. Clappison: The report, 'UK National Strategy for Global Environmental Research', by an expert panel of the inter-agency committee on global environmental change, was publicly launched by the committee chairman, Sir Ronald Oxburgh, on 10 September at the 1996 conference of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. In addition to the targeted dissemination to all United Kingdom organisations and institutions involved with global environmental research and extensive international distribution, the document has been made generally available through the Internet.

The report identifies a close match between its priority research issues and the "Forward Look" plans of the funding agencies. This no doubt reflects the influence of the inter-agency committee's previous strategy reports. The Department's research programme "Forward Look" is in line with the report recommendation to maintain current research efforts over the next few years. All institutions engaged in global environmental research will benefit from the strategy as they plan future research against the background of the report's recommendations on the conceptual approach, research directions and priorities, enabling technologies and infrastructure, and communication and co-ordination.

Information Technology

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources have been committed each year since 1979 by his Department to the development of

environmental information software and computer-based environmental research; and what steps have been taken to disseminate this information. [40481]

Mr. Clappison: The Department makes information about the environment and environmental research publicly available via a wide range of databases and more recently the Internet. Details on each system have not been collated centrally and it would entail disproportionate cost to provide the annual resource estimates requested. Guidance on the use of systems is available to the public from the Department's library. They include:

- The RESLINE database containing details of the Department's research.
- Details of all Departmental publications in the British Library BLAISE database.
- Data supplied to the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council for inclusion on the UK FOCUS and AGREP databases.
- The BRIX and FLAIR databases produced by the Building Research Establishment in which environmental matters form a significant part.
- The Department's World Wide Web home page (http://www.open.gov.doe/) on the Internet which includes UK environmental statistics based on those published in the Department's annual 'Digest of Environmental Statistics', 'Air Quality Information', and the 'Air Quality Archive'.

Systems under development include the European information and observation network—EIONET—which will connect member states to the European Environment Agency in Copenhagen and gather information on the state of the environment at the European level.

Occupational Ill Health

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many working hours have been lost in each of the last 10 years due to occupational ill health. [40420]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is not collected on a regular basis. However, a survey of self-reported work-related illness in England and Wales estimated that 700,000 workers believed they had experienced illnesses caused or made worse by their work and which resulted in 13 million days off work in 1989–90.

Radioactive Waste Management

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish his conclusions on the responses made to the review of the past five years' work of his Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee, announced on 8 July; if a summary of the responses and original submissions will be made public; and if he will place a list of the responses in the Library. [40394]

Mr. Clappison: The results of the financial management and policy review of the radioactive waste Management Advisory Committee will be announced in due course.

Such reviews are conducted in two stages. An announcement will be made on completion of the "prior options" stage, and if it is decided that RWMAC should continue, the review will go on to address the committee's structure and mode of operation.

Subject to the agreement of those concerned, I will place a list of respondents and copies of their submissions in the Library of the House when the review has been completed.

River Thames

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) of 16 July, *Official Report*, column *432*, concerning the River Thames advisory group and working party respectively, if he will give for each of the persons involved to be members for both groups *(a)* their qualifications, occupations and other inquiries relating to the River Thames, *(b)* any financial or commercial interest they have concerning the Thames and its environment and *(c)* the number of meetings each have attended in the year 1995 and 1996. [40405]

Mr. Gummer: Members of my Thames advisory group were invited to contribute to its work on the basis of their personal contribution and knowledge across a range of fields and disciplines. My Department does not keep details of their qualifications, occupations or personal affairs.

There have been six meetings of the group so far in 1995 and 1996. The number of meetings attended by each member is as follows:

- Steven Norris: 3
- Alan Baxter: 6
- Michael Cassidy: 1
- Sir Philip Dowson: 3
- Paul Finch: 4
- Nicky Gavron: 4
- Christopher Howes: 5
- Simon Jenkins: 1
- Stuart Lipton: 5
- Richard MacCormac: 4
- Christopher Moran: 3
- Lord Rogers: 5
- Eric Sorensen: 5
- Stewart Steven: 3
- Kim Wilkie: 6

The River Thames working group is chaired by my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London and its membership is a matter for him.

Taxonomy

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what opportunities exist under the provisions of the Darwin initiative for British-based taxonomists and entomologists to study the inventory of known species and to explore the development of inventory taxonomy of species thought likely to exist but not yet identified at research institutes and universities in the United Kingdom. [40483]

Mr. Clappison: The Darwin initiative is designed to bring British expertise to bear on the biodiversity needs of developing countries, and the Department has just invited applications for the next round of funding. Taxonomic work is one of the main areas funded under the initiative. The only work on British collections is that carried out in the course of training developing country scientists.

Supermarkets

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the number of large supermarkets within Greater Manchester which do not have sprinkler systems. [40373]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have not made any such estimate. My Department does not collect statistical information on properties which do or do not have particular fire safety measures.

Sellafield

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what notification he has received from British Nuclear Fuels in respect of proposals to apply for a variation in its discharge consents under the Environment Act 1995, the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 and Nuclear Installations Act 1965 for the Thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield. [40396]

Mr. Clappison: Applications for disposal authorisations, or for variations to existing authorisations, under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993—as amended by the Environment Act 1995—are made to the Environment Agency. I understand that British Nuclear Fuels plc is considering applying for a variation to the current authorisation for disposal of waste gases, mists and dusts from its Sellafield site. The Nuclear Installations Act 1965 does not apply to discharge consents.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the inspector's report into the rock characterisation facility at Sellafield. [40504]

Sir Paul Beresford: In accordance with usual procedures, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will publish the report when he has reached his decision on the matter. Until he has received and considered the report, I cannot say when that might be.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the timetable for issuing a full safety certificate for large scale reprocessing at THORP at Sellafield. [40514]

Sir Paul Beresford: The THORP plant at BNFL Sellafield is currently being commissioned, and will eventually operate, under the requirements of the existing Sellafield site licence issued by the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate. HSE intends to issue a consent for THORP when commissioning has been satisfactorily completed and it has received the appropriate documentation. This has not been received from BNFL.

Some reprocessing activity has been taking place as part of the active commissioning programme which started in January 1994, but full operation will only be undertaken when the consent to operation is issued.

Water Resources Directive

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what responses he has made to date to the EU draft framework directive on water resources issued in February. [40407]

Mr. Clappison: In December 1995 the Environment Council adopted a set of conclusions on European Community water policy which, amongst other things, invited the European Commission to present a communication on the subject. The communication was issued on 21 February, and the Commission proposes to bring forward a framework directive on water resources in due course. The Government submitted an explanatory memorandum to the European Scrutiny Committee on 16 April.

Environment Agency

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reports the Environment Agency has produced to date on the state of the British environment; and what role his Department has in distributing the Environment Agency's reports. [40479]

Mr. Clappison: The Environment Agency published in April 1996 a report entitled "The Environment of England and Wales; a Snapshot". An online version of the report has been placed recently on the agency's Internet web site, and this updates the printed version. Copies of the report were placed in the Library of the House. My Department has no role in distributing Environment Agency reports.

AEA Technology

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what environmental protection guarantees are in place in respect of the sale of AEA Technology. [40341]

Mr. Clappison: I expect AEA Technology to continue to bid for environmental research and services tendered by the Department and to maintain the quality and integrity of work which made AEAT a substantial and long standing contractor in the past. AEA Technology activities will be subject to the same regulatory standards of environmental safety as any other private company. This will principally involve controls pursuant to the Radioactive Substances Act, the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Water Resources Act 1991 and the Environment Act 1995.

Intergovernmental Conference

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what submissions his Department has made to the intergovernmental conference on transparency in regard to environmental policy and information disclosure; and what plans he has for future submissions. [40589]

Mr. Clappison: The United Kingdom has made no submissions on transparency to the intergovernmental conference.

The IGC discussions have not altered the Department's policy of openness which accords with the Government's code of practice on access to Government information, published in 1994.

The Department will not be making submissions to the intergovernmental conference.

Sponsored Bodies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in the procedure of appointments to sponsored bodies since recommendations were put to the Directors Forum on Sponsored Bodies in September last year. [40651]

Sir Paul Beresford: Revised procedures have been introduced in the Department of the Environment which fulfil the relevant recommendations of the first report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life and comply with the code of practice and guidance issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. It will now be the normal practice to advertise vacancies on the boards of executive non-departmental public bodies, to interview candidates before appointment and to involve an independent person in the selection process.

Water Directive

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what matters of environmental concern were discussed at the European Commission meeting of 9 October; and what were the reasons for the withdrawal from the agenda of deliberation on the planned water quality framework directive. [40647]

Mr. Clappison: The agenda for the weekly Commission meeting is a matter for the Commission rather than for my Department; any decision not to discuss the proposed water quality framework directive is therefore an internal one for the Commission..

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 15 October 1996

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to review the workings of the Serious Fraud Office; and if he will make a statement. [40554]

The Attorney-General: The Serious Fraud Office continues to implement recommendations made in the Graham report and by the Davie group, including measures to rationalise its investigative function and to make the most efficient use of police resources. I have no plans for further reorganisation.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the total number of magistrates' courts in each region, for each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [39116]

Mr. Streeter *[pursuant to reply, 24 July 1996, c. 340]:* The information requested is not collected centrally. Magistrates' courts are locally managed by magistrates' courts committees under the provisions of the Justices of the Peace Act 1979.

The extra time to answer this question afforded by the parliamentary adjournment has allowed officials to contact each of the 100 MCCs, and for the requested information to be collected. The cost of this exercise has exceeded the maximum limit set for answering parliamentary questions.

The information requested is as follows:

Magistrates courts' committee area	*The number of magistrates courts 1992 to 1996*				
	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Avon	5	5	5	5	5
Barking	1	1	1	1	1
Barnet	2	2	2	2	2
Barnsley	1	1	1	1	1
Bedfordshire	6	6	6	6	6
Berkshire and Oxfordshire	16	15	15	13	13
Bexley	1	1	1	1	1
Birmingham	2	2	2	2	2
Bolton	1	1	1	1	1
Brent	1	1	1	1	1
Bromley	1	1	1	1	1
Buckinghamshire	6	6	6	6	6
Bury	1	1	1	1	1
Calderdale	3	1	1	1	1
Cambridgeshire	8	7	7	7	7
Cheshire	10	10	10	9	10
City of London	1	1	1	1	1
Cleveland	3	3	3	3	3
Cornwall	9	9	9	9	9
Coventry	1	1	1	1	1
Croydon	1	1	1	1	1
Cumbria	12	12	12	10	10
Derbyshire	13	13	12	12	12
Devon	18	18	18	18	17
Doncaster	2	2	2	2	2
Dorset	12	12	12	11	11
Dudley	3	3	3	3	3
Durham	9	9	9	9	9
Dyfed	15	10	10	10	10
Ealing	2	2	2	2	2
East Sussex	9	4	4	4	4
Enfield	1	1	1	1	1
Essex	13	13	13	13	12
Gateshead	1	1	1	1	1
Gloucestershire	11	11	9	9	9
Gwent	11	11	10	10	9
Hampshire	16	13	12	10	10
Haringey	2	2	2	2	2
Harrow	1	1	1	1	1
Havering	1	1	1	1	1
Hereford and Worcester	10	9	9	9	9
Hertfordshire	10	10	9	9	9
Hillingdon	1	1	1	1	1
Hounslow	2	2	2	2	2
Humberside	17	17	17	17	10
Inner London	20	19	19	19	17
Isle of Wight	1	1	1	1	1
Kent	17	16	16	15	14
Kingston upon Thames	1	1	1	1	1
Knowsley	2	2	2	1	1
Lancashire	16	14	13	13	13
Leeds	5	5	5	5	5
Leicestershire	8	8	8	8	8
Lincolnshire	14	14	14	14	14
Liverpool	1	1	1	1	1
Manchester	1	1	1	1	1
Merton	1	1	1	1	1
Newcastle upon Tyne	2	2	2	2	2
Newham	2	2	2	1	1
Norfolk	11	10	10	10	8
North Tyneside	2	1	1	1	1
North Wales	24	24	24	21	19
North Yorkshire	19	19	18	17	17
Northamptonshire	6	6	6	6	6
Northumberland	6	4	4	4	4
Nottinghamshire	5	5	5	5	5
Oldham	1	1	1	1	1
Powys	6	6	6	6	6
Redbridge	1	1	1	1	1
Richmond upon Thames	1	1	1	1	1
Rochdale	2	2	2	2	1
Rotherham	1	1	1	1	1
Salford	2	2	1	1	1
Sandwell	2	2	2	2	2
Sefton	2	2	2	2	2
Sheffield	1	1	1	1	1
Shropshire	7	7	7	7	7
Solihull	1	1	1	1	1
Somerset	12	6	6	6	6
South Wales	9	9	8	8	8
South Tyneside	2	2	2	2	2
St. Helens	1	1	1	1	1
Staffordshire	15	14	14	13	13
Stockport	1	1	1	1	1
Suffolk	10	10	10	10	10
Sunderland	3	3	3	3	3
Surrey	11	11	10	10	10

Magistrates courts' committee area	The number of magistrates courts 1992 to 1996				
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Sutton	1	1	1	1	1
Tameside	2	2	2	2	2
Trafford	1	1	1	1	1
Walsall	2	2	2	2	2
Waltham Forest	1	1	1	1	1
Warwickshire	6	5	5	5	5
West Glamorgan	5	5	5	5	5
West Riding Metropolitan	8	8	8	8	8
West Sussex	7	7	7	6	6
Wigan	2	2	2	2	2
Wiltshire	11	6	6	6	6
Wirral	2	2	2	2	2
Wolverhampton	1	1	1	1	1
Total	576	537	526	510	491

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates' courts are, *(a)* administered by an office in a different area, and *(b)* deal with custody cases in another area; what were the figures five years ago; and if he will make a statement. [39072]

Mr. Streeter *[holding answer 24 July 1996]:* The information requested is not collected centrally. Magistrates' courts are locally managed by magistrates' courts committees under the provisions of the Justices of the Peace Act 1979.

The extra time to answer this question afforded by the parliamentary adjournment has allowed officials to contact each of the 100 MCCs, and for the requested information to be collected. The cost of this exercise has exceeded the maximum limit set for answering parliamentary questions.

Area has been taken to mean petty sessional division and emergency arrangements or Saturday morning rota sittings have not been included.

The information requested follows:

Magistrates court's committee area	Magistrates courts administered by an office in a different area		Number of courts dealing with custody cases in a different area	
	1992	1996	1992	1996
Avon	—	—	—	—
Barking	—	—	—	—
Barnet	—	—	—	—
Barnsley	—	—	—	—
Bedfordshire	4	4	—	—
Berkshire and Oxfordshire	4	4	—	—
Bexley	—	—	—	—
Birmingham	—	—	—	—
Bolton	—	—	—	—
Brent	—	—	—	—
Bromley	—	—	—	—
Buckinghamshire	—	—	—	—
Bury	—	—	—	—
Calderdale	—	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire	3	4	—	—
Cheshire	1	—	—	—
City of London	—	—	—	—
Cleveland	—	—	—	—
Cornwall	8	6	—	—
Coventry	—	—	—	—
Croydon	—	—	—	—
Cumbria	8	6	—	—
Derbyshire	2	2	—	1
Devon	4	3	—	—
Doncaster	—	—	—	—
Dorset	7	7	—	—
Dudley	1	1	—	—
Durham	—	—	—	—
Dyfed	9	6	—	—
Ealing	—	—	—	—
East Sussex	3	—	—	—
Enfield	—		—	—
Essex	6	5	—	—
Gateshead	—	—	—	—
Gloucestershire	2	2	1	1
Gwent	8	6	10	8
Hampshire	—	—	—	—
Haringey	1	1	—	—
Harrow	—	—	—	—
Havering	—	—	—	—
Hereford and Worecester	1	1	—	—
Hertfordshire	5	3	—	—
Hillingdon	—	—	—	—
Hounslow	—	—	—	—
Humberside	11	6	—	—
Inner London	—	—	—	—
Isle of Wight	—	—	—	—
Kent	5	9	—	—
Kingston Upon Thames	—	—	—	—
Knowsley	—	—	—	—
Lancashire	2	4	—	—
Leeds	4	4	—	—
Leicestershire	3	5	—	1
Lincolnshire	6	7	—	—
Liverpool	—	—	—	—
Manchester	—	—	—	—
Merton	—	—	—	—
Newcastle upon Tyne	—	—	—	—
Newham	—	—	—	—
Norfolk	3	2	—	—
North Tyneside	—	—	—	—
North Wales	9	7	—	—
North Yorkshire	5	7	—	1
Northamptonshire	5	5	4	4
Northumberland	—	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	1	1	—	—
Oldham	—	—	—	—
Powus	4	4	6	6
Redbridge	—	—	—	—
Richmond upon Thames	—	—	—	—
Rochdale	—	1	—	1
Rotherham	—	—	—	—
Salford	—	—	—	—
Sandwell	—	—	—	1
Sefton	—	—	—	—
Sheffield	—	—	—	—
Shropshire	4	5	—	—
Solihull	—	—	—	—
Somerset	—	1	—	—
South Wales	1	1	—	—
South Tyneside	—	—	—	—
St. Helens	—	1	—	—
Staffordshire	5	8	—	2
Stockport	—	—	—	—
Suffolk	—	—	—	—
Sunderland	—	—	—	—
Surrey	3	—	—	—
Sutton	—	—	—	—
Tameside	—	—	—	—
Trafford	—	—	—	—
Walsall	—	—	—	—
Waltham Forest	—	—	—	—
Warwickshire	2	3	—	—
West Glamorgan	2	3	—	—
West Riding				

Magistrates court's committee area	Magistrates courts administered by an office in a different area		Number of courts dealing with custody cases in a different area	
	1992	1996	1992	1996
Metropolitan	—	—	—	—
West Sussex	3	2	—	—
Wigan	—	—	—	—
Wiltshire	6	1	—	—
Wirral	—	—	—	—
Wolverhampton	—	—	—	—
Total	161	148	21	26

Where a section shows no value the answer was none.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Manufacturing Productivity

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the trends in manufacturing productivity in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other member states of the European Union in each of the first three quarters of 1996. [40549]

Mr. Greg Knight: Figures on UK manufacturing output per person employed are published by the Office for National Statistics in table 4.7 of "Economic Trends", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. They are also available on the central shared database, which can be accessed from the Library. The figures up to August 1996 will be released on Wednesday 16 October. Comparable figures for the other member states of the European Union are not yet available.

British Coal Enterprise

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what sum was received by the Government from the sale of British Coal Enterprises. [40422]

Mr. Page: The sale of British Coal Enterprise is a matter for British Coal. I understand that the corporation has not yet completed the sale of all the activities of BCE.

Research Establishments

Mr. Waterson: To ask the president of the Board of Trade when he will place further memoranda concerning the prior options reviews of public sector research establishments in the Library. [41075]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have placed in the Library of the House the memorandum setting out the rationale underlying the decisions concerning ADAS which were announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 18 July.

Businesses

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are his plans for reforming Government support for business. [41076]

Mr. Lang: We are today launching two new challenges. I am also confirming a major simplification of central schemes.

Both challenges are designed to enhance the competitiveness of businesses, either through helping local partnerships to design and deliver high quality business support to firms—particularly smaller firms in their area—or through projects to improve the business performance of specific sectors of industry.

The local challenge will build on business link partnerships. It will reinforce the opportunities offered to small firms to access support in the co-ordinated way that these partnerships provide. It will encourage cross-partnership bids where these add value.

The sector challenge will bring together in one place the majority of Government funding for sectoral activity. it covers activities designed to have a broad impact on the competitiveness of sectors wherever they are located in the United Kingdom, including innovative approaches to export promotion.

A radical streamlining of DTI business support will reduce the number of separate schemes from 140 to fewer than 25 central programmes plus the two new challenges.

Further announcements in the coming weeks will set out in more detail our plans on specific schemes aimed at helping smaller firms to win through exporting, foresight the information society, and so on.

The Government have agreed criteria under which all current or potential new central schemes will be reviewed. Such reviews will be an on-going process with annual reports back to Ministers. We are committed to changing the emphasis of support away from central towards local and sectoral design and delivery. Over time, central schemes will become the exception, not the rule.

We are also committed to involving businesses and business support organisations more directly in deciding which schemes should continue. In future, we will consult businesses and business support organisations as a matter of course before taking decisions. I am pleased therefore to welcome the new consultative group being established by the business link partners to provide their input into this exercise.

Business told us that it wanted simpler, more accessible and more flexible support. The proposals announced today delivery just that.

I am placing copies of the local and sector challenge bidding guidelines in the Library of the House.

TREASURY

VAT

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing for each member state of the European Community the rates levied by value added tax on food in shops, household fuel, children's clothing, books, newspapers and magazines, public transport, water and sewage services, newly constructed homes, second-hand homes and the standard of tax most recently adopted; when the current VAT agreement expires; and what remunerations have been received from the Commission concerning its services or continuation for any stated period. [41410]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* The information about VAT rates is set out in the table. The current EC VAT agreement (the sixth VAT directive), and so the provisions governing the VAT rates detailed in the table, have no expiry date. In the absence of any unanimous agreement upon 'definitive' VAT regime, the existing provisions continue to apply automatically and without time limit.

VAT rates on various goods and services in the EC

Percentage rate of VAT

Member state	*Foods in shops*	*Household fuel*	*Children's clothing*	*Books*	*Newspaper and magazines*	*Public transport*	*Water and sewage supplies*	*Homes*		*Standard rate*
								New	*Second-hand*	
Austria	10	20	20	10	10	10	20	20	Exempt	20
Belgium	6	[1]21	21	6	6	6	[2]21	12	Exempt	21
Denmark	25	25	25	25	[3]25	[4]Exempt	[5]Exempt	25	Exempt	25
Finland	17	22	22	12	22	6	22	22	Exempt	22
France	[6]5.5	20.6	20.6	5.5	2.1	5.5	[7]20.6	20.6	Exempt	20.6
Germany	7	15	15	7	7	[8]15	[9]15	Exempt	Exempt	15
Greece	8	18	18	4	4	8	[10]18	18	Exempt	18
Ireland	[11]0	12.5	0	0	12.5	Exempt	21	12.5	Exempt	21
Italy	[12]10	[13]10	16	4	4	[14]10	19	[15]19	19	19
Luxembourg	3	[16]12	3	3	3	15	15	Exempt	Exempt	15
Netherlands	6	17.5	17.5	6	6	6	[17]17.5	17.5	Exempt	17.5
Portugal	[18]17	[19]17	17	5	5	5	[20]17	[21]Exempt	Exempt	17
Spain	[22]7	16	16	4	4	7	7	16	Exempt	16
Sweden	12	25	25	25	6	12	25	25	Exempt	25
UK	[23]0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	Exempt	17.5

[1] A reduced rate of 12 per cent. applies to coal and peat.
[2] A reduced rate of 6 per cent. applies to the supply of water.
[3] A zero rate applies to magazines.
[4] Transport on regular services is exempt, but on chartered buses is taxable at 25 per cent.
[5] Exemption only applies to water in connection with the letting of a house or premise; otherwise the standard rate of 25 per cent. applies.
[6] Sweets, chocolate, margarine and vegetable fat are subject to the standard rate of 20.6 per cent.
[7] A reduced rate of 5.5 per cent. applies to sewage services.
[8] A reduced rate of 7 per cent. applies to transport which takes place within a town or where the distance does not exceed 50 km.
[9] A reduced rate of 7 per cent. applies to supplies of water.
[10] A reduced rate of 8 per cent. applies to sewage services.
[11] Chocolates, sweets, biscuits etc. are taxable at 12.5 per cent.
[12] A reduced rate of 4 per cent. applies to basic foodstuffs such as bread and pasta; a rate of 16 per cent. applies to items such as lobsters and oysters.
[13] A 16 per cent. rate applies to coal.
[14] Transport between towns which are less than 50 km apart is exempt.
[15] A reduced rate of 4 per cent. applies to certain social housing.
[16] A 12 per cent. rate applies to wood, oil and coal.
[17] A reduced rate of 6 per cent. applies to the supply of water.
[18] A reduced rate of 12 per cent. applies to unprepared foodstuffs.
[19] A reduced rate of 5 per cent. applies to electricity and oil.
[20] A reduced rate of 5 per cent. applies to the supply of water.
[21] A reduced rate of 5 per cent. applies to certain constructions of housing by building co-operatives.
[22] A reduced rate of 4 per cent. applies to certain basic foodstuffs.
[23] The standard rate of 17.5 per cent. applies to confectionery, crisps, ice cream, chocolate etc.

Tax Secrecy

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to remove tax secrecy from *(a)* the Channel Islands, *(b)* the Isle of Man, *(c)* Gibraltar and *(d)* Caribbean dependencies; and if he will enter into discussions with the authorities of such places about the prevention of drug trafficking and fraud. [40368]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* Arrangements already exist for the exchange of information with the Channel Islands and other dependencies, where appropriate, for taxation purposes, including the detection and prevention of fraud. Legislation has been in place for some time to tackle the avoidance of tax through the use of off-shore concerns, and if the Government become aware of any significant new risk in this area, further legislation will be considered.

The Government take a prominent role in advising these territories on suitable legislation concerning the prevention of drug trafficking and fraud. All have drug money laundering legislation and some have extended these provisions to cover all serious crimes. Many have statutory gateways which allow information to be passed to overseas regulators. These measures have removed many obstacles caused by secrecy provisions, and further work is continuing to improve the exchange of information with these territories.

Income Statistics

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the percentage change in real personal disposable income *(a)* overall, *(b)* of persons in employment and *(c)* of persons not in employment, for each year since 1979. [40364]

Mrs Angela Knight *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* Information on real personal disposable income at 1990 prices is published annually in the United Kingdom National Accounts, the Blue Book, and is also held on the Office for National Statistics database. These sources are available in the House of Commons Library. It is not possible to calculate the proportion of real personal disposable income which goes to persons in employment and to persons not in employment.

However, information at current prices is available on sources of household incomes in table 4.9 of the Blue Book; and analyses of incomes, only at household level, based on the family expenditure survey are also available—results are published annually in the relevant editions of "Family Spending" which are available in the Library.

The percentage change in overall real personal disposable income at 1990 prices in each year since 1979 is:

1979: 5.7
1980: 1.5
1981: –0.8
1982: –0.5
1983: 2.7
1984: 3.7
1985: 3.2
1986: 4.4
1987: 3.7
1988: 6.2
1989: 4.2
1990: 1.9
1991: 0.0
1992: 2.0
1993: 1.8
1994: 1.2
1995:3.0

Incomes

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are currently earning less than £3 per hour; and what was the number in 1991. [40142]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The labour force survey shows that, in spring 1996, there were 1.74 million people in Great Britain earning less than £3 per hour. The labour force survey did not collect earnings information prior to 1992.

Glaucoma

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new cases of glaucoma were detected in each of the last five years. [40573]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Statistics on glaucoma are not collected centrally.

Oral Cancer

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new cases of oral cancer were detected *(a)* in each regional health authority and *(b)* nationally in (i) 1991 and (ii) 1992. [40572]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The number of new cases of oral cancer detected in *(a)* each regional health authority and *(b)* nationally in 1991 are shown in the table. Data for 1992 are not yet available.

Oral Cancer Registrations (ICD[1] codes 140–149 excluding 142 by regional health authority and constituent countries of the United Kingdom.

1991[2]	*Number*
Northern	221
Yorkshire	227
Trent	249
East Anglian	110
North-west Thames	207
North-east Thames	175
South-east Thames	199
South-west Thames	142
Wessex	194
Oxford	124
South Western	155
West Midlands	320
Mersey	189
North Western	249
England	2,761
Wales[3]	185
Scotland	466
North Ireland	103
UK	3,515

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.
[2] All data are provisional, except those for Scotland.
[3] 1990 data; 1991 are not yet available.

International Monetary Fund

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the recent annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World bank. [40951]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I attended meetings of the IMF's interim committee and the IMF/World bank development committee in Washington on 29 and 30 September, and the IMF/World bank annual meeting on 1–2 October, where progress was made on several issues of importance for the world economy and for developing countries. As usual, the IMF and World bank meetings were preceded by meetings of the G7 and G10 finance Ministers and central bank governors. I also attended the Commonwealth Finance Ministers' meeting in Bermuda on 24 to 26 September.

One of my top priorities for these meetings was the reduction in debt of the poorest, most indebted countries. I first launched an initiative on this subject at the Commonwealth Finance Ministers' meeting in Valletta two years ago. This year the IMF/World bank launched their own proposals in response to my initiative. These proposals were discussed in Bermuda and in Washington. I am delighted to be able to tell the House that they were endorsed. All other Ministers in the development committee joined me in calling for implementation to begin for the first potentially eligible countries before the end of 1996.

All major creditors—the IMF, World bank, and Paris Club—confirmed in Washington that they would play their part in delivering debt sustainability. The World bank will do so through the creation of trust funds. It has already allocated $500 million, and expects to contribute

up to $2 billion in all. The IMF has undertaken to provide a combination of grants and loans which have longer maturities and grace periods, thereby effecting a substantial reduction in the value of its share of debt. The Paris Club of official bilateral creditors has agreed to go beyond Naples terms, on a case-by-case basis, up to 80 per cent. reduction of present value of claims. This is something the British Government have been advocating for many years, since it was first proposed by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, in 1990.

I regard agreement on this initiative, which the Prime Minister and I have advocated at successive international meetings over the last two years, as a major achievement. In the timescale of international economic diplomacy, two years from my first outline proposal to worldwide agreement on implementing a detailed scheme is good going. I am grateful to those who have worked to help us get there, including the voluntary organisations which have kept up the international pressure for action, as well as the officials of the international organisations who have helped put the pieces in place. We now have a scheme that offers real hope to some of the world's poorest countries. I will continue to work to ensure it is implemented in a flexible and commonsense way by the institutions concerned, to give countries that qualify an early and lasting exit from unsustainable debt.

I will also work to try to ensure that poor countries do not slip back into unsustainable debt, and that all developing countries have the best possible access to work markets and flows of private sector capital. I was therefore glad that, at the Commonwealth Finance Minister's meeting in Bermuda, Ministers agreed on the need for donors and creditors to discourage the financing of unproductive spending in developing countries. At Bermuda also, Ministers stressed the importance of an open, rules-based and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system. Ministers also discussed the rapid expansion in private capital flows, acknowledging their importance in promoting economic growth and investment. I pointed out the need for financial sector reform and liberalisation of the capital account. At my request, a small working group of Finance Ministry officials from Commonwealth countries will now study the role of national and international policies in encouraging private capital flows for investment.

Following another UK initiative, Ministers in Bermuda endorsed the new and updated 40 recommendations agreed by the financial action task force at the end of June 1996, which set out the measures countries should take to combat money laundering. In addition, we approved the publication of a comprehensive set of guidelines, prepared by the Commonwealth Secretariat, to help Commonwealth countries with the practical implementation of their anti-money-laundering strategies. Ministers also supported the establishment of regional groups—modelled on the Caribbean financial action task force—to enable Commonwealth countries to review their progress in implementing anti money laundering measures. We also urged the IMF and the World bank to take full account of the need for countries to maintain effective anti-money laundering systems in their surveillance activities and in their provision of technical assistance.

At the G7 meeting in Washington, we reviewed economic and financial market developments in the world economy and assessed the outlook for the G7 economies. In G7 countries, inflation remains at low levels, efforts are being made to reduce fiscal deficits, and external imbalances have receded. We agreed that policies should continue to be directed at sustaining non-inflationary growth and reduction of imbalances. We reaffirmed our standing commitment to co-operate closely in the exchange markets. At the request of my US and Canadian colleagues, we had a useful discussion about progress towards EMU.

We met representatives of the European Commission and the senior Russian economic team on developments in the Russian economy and progress on economic reform. We agreed that Russia has made significant progress in the area of macroeconomic stabilisation. We also agreed on the importance of strengthening Russia's fiscal balances in consolidating the gains it has made to date, and on the importance of adhering to the structural reform programme agreed with the IMF.

We reviewed the progress achieved and the considerable work underway to implement the initiatives arising from the last year's Halifax summit, and this discussion was continued in the G10 and interim committee.

The G10 discussed issues relating to international monetary and financial stability. We welcomed the progress that has been made towards the establishment of the new arrangements to borrow. I emphasised the benefits these arrangements would bring, not only through increasing the resources available to the IMF in the case of a threat to the stability of the international monetary system, but also in involving in the facility a wider range of countries including some of the emerging market economies, recognising their interest in the stability of the international financial system.

At the IMF interim committee, I stressed the importance of freedom of capital movement, and the benefits for countries that have not already done so of making careful progress in dismantling their remaining capital controls. I called on the IMF to help its members in this process, and I launched a proposal to bring the IMF's articles up to date to recognise its role in this area. Other Ministers supported my call to the IMF to revisit its role in relation to capital liberalisation, and to consider whether its present articles should be revised to reflect and promote the fund's proper role in encouraging capital liberalisation and helping member countries reap the full benefits of international capital flows. The Interim Committee agreed to discuss this at its next meeting in the spring.

We also agreed a new declaration—an update to the one first agreed in Madrid two years ago—on the partnership for sustainable global growth. This included calls to achieve budget balance, improve fiscal transparency, tackle corruption, prevent money laundering, encourage freedom of capital movements, and ensure the soundness of banking systems.

In the development committee, I stressed the importance of trade and development, and in particular giving poor countries the opportunity for growth through access to world markets. Many Ministers joined me in

support for the President of the World Trade Organisation's proposals that developed countries should provide access duty-free to all the exports of least developed countries.

Copies of my speeches to the Commonwealth Finance Minsters' meeting, the interim and development committees, the annual meeting, and the communiques of those meeting and the G10 Finance Ministers' meeting, have been placed in the Library of the House. The G7 did not on this occasion issue a communiqué.

Public Bodies

Mr Miller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidelines have been issued to non-departmental public bodies in relation to the implementation of local pay delegation, following the decision to end the previous pay arrangements for such organisations. [40133]

Mr. Waldegrave: Departments were given delegated responsibility for the pay systems of their civil service staff outside the senior civil service from 1 April 1996. This change did not directly affect non-departmental public bodies—they already had responsibility for their pay systems, subject to Treasury approval or consent in many, but not all, cases, and do not generally employ civil servants. However many NDPBs have pay systems which are analogous to or closely follow those of the civil servants in the sponsor department. As Departments introduce pay systems tailored to their particular requirements, NDPBs will need to consider what changes are appropriate for them. The Treasury has issued guidance to help departments think through the many issues involved, and Departments are free to show this to their NDPBs if they decide that is helpful.

ENVIRONMENT

Waste Recycling

15. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further assistance he proposes to support local authority local waste recycling schemes; and if he will make a statement. [38365]

Mr. Gummer: The measures and policy framework to assist local recycling are set out in the White Paper "Making Waste Work".

Energy Conservation

17. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding energy conservation. [38367]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend and I regularly receive a wide range of representations on this subject.

Area Cost Adjustment

18. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the application of the area cost adjustment on local government funding. [38368]

Mr. Gummer: In our consultation, all four local government organisations have expressed reservations about implementing this review and have asked for further work. I will consider the representations after my meeting with them tomorrow.

24. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to reform the area cost adjustment. [38374]

Sir Paul Beresford: We will be discussing the review of the area cost adjustment with the local authority associations tomorrow at the consultative council on local government finance. Once we have taken their views, we will decide how to proceed. [38374]

Sewage

19. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of sewage outfalls into rivers or the sea receive tertiary treatment. [38369]

Mr. Gummer: Fourteen.

Coastal Management

20. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the management of coastal areas. [38370]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We recognise that coastal areas are an important resource and have taken a number of steps to promote their effective management. In England, these include creation of a national coastal forum, publication of policy guidelines for the coast and—later this month—the issue of a best practice guide to coastal management.

Pollution Report

21. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the latest report of the royal commission on environmental pollution. [38371]

Mr. Gummer: We welcome the royal commission's 19th report on the "Sustainable Use of Soil." We are considering all its recommendations carefully and expect to publish a formal response to the report by the end of the year.

Local Government Conduct

22. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent studies he has made of the conduct of local government. [38372]

Sir Paul Beresford: We have made no recent studies of the conduct of local government. However, the Nolan committee announced in June that its third study will examine aspects of conduct in local government in England, Scotland and Wales.

London Governance

23. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the governance of London. [38373]

Sir Paul Beresford: The current arrangements serve our capital city and the nation extremely well.

Wetlands

25. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made on the conservation of wetlands in Europe. [38375]

Mr. Clappison: The Government have broadly welcomed the policy set out in the European Commission's communication on the wise use and conservation of wetlands. Many positive steps are already being taken in Europe to conserve wetlands under EU directives and international conventions. The UK makes a major contribution. For example, we have listed 107 internationally important wetlands under the Ramsar convention. Many wetland sites have also been classified as special protection areas under the birds directive. Other sites have been submitted to the Commission as candidate special areas for conservation under the habitats directive, and will be protected in the interim pending formal designation. [38375]

Housing

26. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes are under construction and how many have been built during the last 12 months; and what were the equivalent figures in 1978-79. [38376]

Mr. Curry: It is estimated that 146,000 dwellings were completed in England during the 12 months to August 1996 and that 197,000 were under construction by the end of August. In comparison, some 227,000 dwellings were completed in the financial year 1978-79 and there were 339,000 under construction at the end of March 1979. [38376]

Global Warming

27. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new responses he plans to combat global warming *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* via international initiatives. [38377]

28. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action is being taken by his Department to meet its objectives in respect of carbon dioxide reductions. [38378]

Mr. Clappison: I am pleased to say that the UK is on target to meet the Rio commitment to return greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2000 and we expect carbon dioxide emissions to be 4 to 8 per cent. below 1990 levels. This achievement reflects the impact of measures set out in the UK climate change programme and the progress report on carbon dioxide emissions.

However, there is no room for complacency. The UK is one of only a handful of states which will meet the Rio commitment and, by the next climate change conference in December 1997, we need to have agreed significant reductions in emissions beyond 2000. That is why I have called on other states to agree to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 5 to 10 per cent below 1990 levels by 2010.

Integrated Regional Office, Yorkshire

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure democratic accountability of integrated regional office officials in Yorkshire. [38379]

Mr. Curry: As head of the Government office for Yorkshire and the Humber, the regional director remains accountable to each of my right hon. Friends the President of the Board of Trade and the Secretaries of State for Education and Employment and for Transport and to me for the delivery of our particular policies and programmes.

Right to Buy

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of state for the Environment how many tenants have exercised the right to buy in the last 12 months. [38366]

Mr. Curry: In the year to March 1996, there were more than 31,500 right-to-buy sales by local authorities and new towns in England. Right to buy and other home ownership schemes are still producing about 180 new home owners a day in Britain.

Policy Initiatives

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what environmental policy initiatives have been launched since 26 July. [38518]

Mr. Clappison: During the parliamentary recess, we have been mainly concerned to develop initiatives which will be announced in this place shortly. Since 26 July, we have launched the following main environmental policy initiatives: consultation on air quality strategy; publication of circular on revised special waste regulations; and publication of draft statutory guidance on contaminated land. In addition, the landfill tax came into operation on 1 October.

Hedgerows

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to take in regard to the protection of hedgerows which were established under private enclosure legislation in the light of a recent court case in East Yorkshire. [40073]

Mr. Clappison: The recent judgment in this case established that the Yorkshire wildlife trust and Mr. Colin Seymour, a parishioner, have locus standi to pursue their application for a declaration that Flamborough parish council is bound by the relevant Enclosure Act and award to preserve part of an enclosure hedge. I understand that the application has yet to be heard by the court. We await the outcome with interest. When that is known, we will consider the implications of this case, if any, for regulations for the protection of important hedgerows to be introduced under section 97 of the Environment Act 1995. Such regulations will not, however, override restrictions imposed by other enactments or agreements, including enclosure awards.

Rating Appeals

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many rating appeals *(a)* in total and *(b)* by valuation office were lodged against the (i) 1990 and (ii) 1995 rating lists; and in each case how many (1) have been resolved and (2) are outstanding. [40423]

Sir Paul Beresford: I am placing in the Library a set of tables which set out, in total, by region and by each office of the Valuation Office agency in England, the number of valid proposals to alter the 1995 rating lists which were received by 31 August 1996, the number settled and the number outstanding.

I am also placing in the Library tables setting out, in total, by region and by each office, the number of proposals to alter the 1990 lists which are outstanding as at 31 August. The number of valid proposals received against the 1990 list in England up to 31 August was 1,402,948. Information on the number received by individual office and region is not available, as the structure and number of offices have now changed.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects all the appeals against *(a)* the 1990 rating list and *(b)* the 1995 rating list to have been resolved; and if he will make a statement. [40424]

Sir Paul Beresford: Current plans are that appeals against the 1990 rating lists outstanding at 1 April 1996 should be cleared by 31 December 1996; appeals made prior to 31 March 1996 by 31 December 1997; and to reduce progressively the time to clear appeals to a maximum of 12 months by 1 April 1988. The only exceptions will be cases where all reasonable efforts to settle matters by agreement have been exhausted and the cases are awaiting determination by valuation tribunals or by the Lands Tribunal.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the research being conducted at British universities into materials that could be exported in support of construction projects compatible with principles of sustainable development; and what support his Department has provided these projects. [40425]

Mr. Clappison: My Department has made no such assessment. However, the Department of the Environment is providing direct support for the enhancement of civil engineering exports, including environmental technology, through collaborative funding of a two-year research project led by the Institution of Civil Engineers. This follows a recommendation from the national technology foresight exercise and will promote appropriate research programmes to cultivate UK expertise critical to export success in civil engineering.

Child Care (North Hull)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce approval of the child care facility in north Hull under the Yorkshire and Humberside objectives of the European regional development fund programme. [40477]

Sir Paul Beresford: The approval letters for this scheme were issued by the Department for Education and Employment on 25 September 1996.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department plans to complete its review of ERDF processes in England. [40421]

Sir Paul Beresford: We hope to complete the review in time for the implementation of the 1997 to 1999 round of objective 2 programmes.

Administrative Expenditure Guidelines

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his finance directorate issued its MINIS 17 guidelines for administrative expenditure. [40654]

Sir Paul Beresford: Expenditure guidelines were issued on 22 September 1995 at the beginning of the MINIS 17 planning round, based on the resource requirements which were agreed in MINIS 16. The guidelines were adjusted as normal throughout the MINIS 17 round, in the light of available resources, technical changes and decisions taken.

Drinking Water Inspectorate

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of whether the outcome of the review of the handling of incidents and prosecutions by the drinking water inspectorate is consistent with the quality procedures manual and the code of enforcement. [40656]

Mr. Clappison: The review of incidents was carried out by a consultant on behalf of the drinking water inspectorate. It did not cover the inspectorate's handling of incidents, but was concerned with the lessons that could be learnt by the water companies in preventing incidents and their handling of them. The objectives of the review included: categorising the type of incidents, causes and frequency of occurrence; carrying out a critical appraisal of water companies' responses to incidents, including actions taken to protect and inform consumers, to communicate with health and local authorities and to prevent recurrence of incidents; assessing the effectiveness of water companies' arrangements for responding to incidents and the actions taken to rectify any faults in the treatment/distribution system, identifying areas of weakness; identifying those incidents which were outside the control of the company and those incidents which were avoidable; identifying those regulations which are commonly breached; and making recommendations appropriate to the findings from the above on any issues which warrant wider consideration.

The inspectorate is assessing the consultant's findings and will publish the main conclusions and lessons to be learnt early in 1997.

The drinking water inspectorate's quality procedures manual consists of a number of procedures covering the inspectorate's activities, including one on the handling of incidents and another on the handling of consumer complaints about drinking water quality. These procedures have been developed as part of the inspectorate's total quality programme. The one on

handling incidents has been in operation since May 1996. This procedure is an important part in achieving a consistent and rigorous approach to the investigations of incidents.

The code for enforcement was introduced at the beginning of 1994. The code sets down how the inspectorate carries out its duties and sets service standards with response times. The inspectorate reports on its performance against the response times in its annual report.

Central Economic Directorate

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to make more transparent the output of his Department's central economic directorate. [40657]

Mr. Clappison: The output of the Department's chief economist directorate is set out each year in its MINIS return.

"Policy Appraisal and the Environment"

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to publish his Department's evaluation of the Government advisory document, "Policy Appraisal and the Environment," as implemented by Government Departments. [40655]

Mr. Clappison: The consultants appointed to undertake the evaluation of "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" are due to submit a draft final report to the Department in mid-December. No decision about the timing of publication has yet been taken.

Environment Policy

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the implications for the United Kingdom environment policy of ISO 14001 published in September; and if he will make a statement. [40653]

Mr. Clappison: The White Paper on sustainable development—Cmnd. 2426—set out the Government's belief that voluntary initiatives by business have a vital role to play. The Government therefore welcome the new international standard for environmental management systems, ISO 14001, as it provides a management tool which will enable businesses voluntarily to improve their environmental performance. I was delighted earlier this week to address the British Standards Institution's conference to launch ISO 14001 in this country, an event which aptly reflected the pioneering work previously done by the institution to establish the world's first specification for environmental management systems, BS 7750. Businesses now have a framework for a voluntary and proactive approach to the management of their environmental impacts which is backed up by a regime of independent certification and is recognised worldwide. Companies making use of the standard will also be well on the way to achieving registration of their sites under the eco-management and audit scheme, which was launched last year across the European Union and is keenly supported by the Government. These initiatives, with their industry-wide recognition, should together form a powerful incentive for progressive business organisations to improve their competitiveness and at the same time raise the level of their environmental performance well above the minimum demanded by regulation.

Unexploded Bombs (London)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department *(a)* holds and *(b)* has assessed in respect of unexploded bombs in London; how many unexploded bombs are estimated to exist in each London authority area; how many bombs are officially listed; what is the estimated risk associated with these; what contact his Department has had with planners, surveyors or their representative groups in this matter; and what action is planned to deal with the situation. [40564]

Sir Paul Beresford: There is nothing I can add to the answer already given today by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who has undertaken to write to the hon. Member.

Wildlife Law (Guide)

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the practitioner's guide to wildlife law. [40945]

Mr. Clappison: Last November, I launched the partnership for action against wildlife crime, and announced that the Department would make funds available to finance a guide to wildlife law. Through the launch of the partnership, we have established good links between enforcement organisations, identified problems hampering enforcement, and sought ways to overcome them. One problem has been the lack of a comprehensive source of information about the various pieces of legislation protecting wildlife.

Tomorrow, the Secretary of State for the Environment will announce the publication of the guide "Wildlife Crime—a Guide to Wildlife Law Enforcement in the UK" at a major seminar on combating environmental crime, to be held at the QEII conference centre in London. A copy of the guide will be placed in the Library of the House.

The seminar will explore the scope for improving the enforcement of trade measures contained in key international environmental agreements to ensure that the UK is at the forefront of tackling the illegal trade in endangered species, ozone-depleting substances and hazardous waste, and whether lessons learnt in one area can be applied in another.

Rural White Paper

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government intend to publish their progress report on the Rural White Paper, "Rural England: A Nation Committed to a Living Countryside". [41082]

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and I intend to publish the progress report "*Rural England* 1996" on 24 October 1996. This reports on progress in implementing the commitments made in "*Rural England*", which we published in October 1995.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 15 October. [38691]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 15 October. [38692]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Ombudsman

Sir Michael Shersby: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement about the offices of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner for England, for Scotland and for Wales. [40949]

The Prime Minister: In accordance with section 1(3) of the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 and schedule 1 to the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993, Sir William Reid will be retiring from these offices on 2 January 1997.

Her Majesty has been pleased to approve the appointment of Mr. Michael Sydney Buckley as Sir William's successor as Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner for England, for Scotland and for Wales, with effect from 3 January 1997.

I am sure all Members of the House would wish me to express their gratitude and admiration for the very able and thorough manner in which Sir William Reid has fulfilled these duties over the last seven years. He has made an outstanding contribution to our public life.

Royal Family (Taxation)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Prime Minister what changes are planned to be made to the memorandum of understanding of 5 February 1993 under which the Queen and the Prince of Wales pay income, capital gains and inheritance tax on a voluntary basis, to take account of the introduction of the new system of self assessment for income tax and capital gains tax. [40950]

The Prime Minister: Yes, a change is required to reflect the new tax payment dates under self assessment. The memorandum of understanding has been amended, and I am placing a copy of the amendment in the Library.

The memorandum of understanding provided that income tax and capital gains tax would be payable on 1 December following the end of the tax year. However, under self-assessment, 1 December will no longer be a tax payment date, and instead income tax will be payable on 31 January and 31 July and capital gains tax on 31 January. The memorandum of understanding has therefore been amended to make income tax and capital gains tax for 1996–97—the transitional year—payable on 31 January 1998; and income tax and capital gains tax for 1997–98 and subsequent years will be payable on 31 January and 31 July in accordance with the normal rules of self assessment.

These new arrangements mean tax will be paid under the memorandum of understanding several months earlier on average than at present.

Changes have also been made to the provisions relating to payments on account, and interest on tax underpaid or overpaid, to bring them into line with the new self assessment rules.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Early Retirement and Voluntary Severance

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many (i) early retirement and (ii) voluntary severance packages were given to civil servants by grade in each Government Department in 1995–96. [40121]

Mr. Freeman: I regret that the information requested is available only at disproportionate cost. However, the table provides details of the number of early retirements and early severances in 1995–96 by main Department.

Department	*Number of early retirements*	*Number of early severances*
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	280	228
Crown Prosecution Service	53	10
Customs and Excise	588	335
Defence	2,285	2,400
Education and Employment	450	627
Environment (including Property Holdings)	180	102
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	98	15
Overseas Development Administration	47	92
Health	284	355
Her Majesty's Prison Service	51	25
Home Office	103	22
Inland Revenue	1,090	466
Lord Chancellor's Department	84	28
National Savings	316	307
Office for National Statistics	55	31
Ordnance Survey	52	33
PSA Services	191	231
Scottish Office	144	105
Scottish Prison Service	119	115
Social Security	1,254	752
Trade and Industry	217	102
Transport	374	525
Treasury	44	64
Welsh Office (including OHMCIS)	48	51
Others	979	595
Total	9,686	7,616

Notes:

1. Numbers relate to departures with a last day of service of 31 March 1995 to 30 March 1996 inclusive.

2. "Others" include 566 early retirements and 430 early severances from employments covered by the Civil Service Compensation Scheme but which do not participate in the scheme for central funding of early departure costs, announced in a Written Answer by the then Chief Secretary, *Official Report*, 19 July 1994 c.95.

Source:

Paymaster agency.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what was the average value of (i) early retirement and (ii) voluntary severance packages given to civil servants by grade in each Government Department in 1995–96 [40120]

(2) what was the highest value (i) early retirement and (ii) voluntary severance package given to civil servants by grade in each Government Department in 1995–96. [40122]

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is available only at disproportionate cost.

Business Support

Mr. Mates: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what conclusions have been drawn from the Government's consultation on simplification of business support, announced in the third competitiveness White Paper. [40512]

The Deputy Prime Minister: My Department is today publishing the conclusions of the cross-government review on simplification of business support. The new arrangements mark a significant development in the partnership between government and business. We are bringing together support form across government into more coherent, simplified programmes. We are also committed to moving away from centrally designed and administered support schemes, which business has told us can be too complex and distant from their own needs, and to making government-funded support as customer focused as possible.

The new challenge funds—local and sectoral—will be set up to support the best proposals for the most effective and customer focused business partnerships. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is today announcing further details of these challenges. Wherever possible these partnerships will take over the design and delivery of business support. Services that are best administered centrally, such as export market information, will be simplified to make them more accessible and responsive to business needs.

By giving business more of a say in how support services are provided, the Government aim to meet their needs more fully and to ensure the best value for money for the taxpayer. Copies of the conclusions, "Helping businesses to win: the conclusions of the consultation", have been placed in the Library of the House.

Executive Agencies

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about the progress of the sales of HMSO, Chessington Computer Centre, Recruitment and Assessment Service and the Occupational Health and Safety Agency. [41081]

Mr. Freeman: These sales have now been completed. Chessington Computer Centre was sold on 31 July to a consortium made up of a management and employee buy-out team, Integris UK—the outsourcing division of Bull Information Systems Ltd.—and financial backers, Close Brothers. The consideration was £12.5 million, of which £1.25 million is deferred until 31 December 1999.

The Occupational Health and Safety Agency—OHSA—was sold on 18 September to BMI Health Services, which is part of General Healthcare Group plc. The consideration was £350,000. In addition, BMI is acting as agents for the Government to collect trade debts owed to OHSA which were estimated to be about £1.4 million when the sale was completed.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office was sold on 30 September to National Publishing Group—NPG—a consortium led by Electra Fleming to trade under the name The Stationery Office. The consideration was £54 million. In addition, NPG has raised £71 million to fund investment, restructuring and working capital for The Stationery Office. In a separate transaction in September, the Government sold an HMSO site near Manchester for £1.4 million.

Recruitment and Assessment Services was sold on 30 September to the Capita Group plc. The consideration was £7.25 million.

SCOTLAND

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many women from ethnic minorities are employed by his Department and its agencies; at what grade; and what measures he has taken to encourage the *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* employment and *(c)* promotion of women from ethnic minorities within his Department and its agencies. [39895]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are seven women members of staff who have declared themselves to be from an ethnic minority background in the Scottish Office and its agencies. Three hold posts at AO grade and four at AA grade. As an employer committed to equal opportunities for all staff we monitor the recruitment, employment and promotion of men and women whatever their background to ensure that no discrimination takes place. In recent months we have established a network group to support staff from an ethnic minority background. That group has discussed awareness raising of employment opportunities in the Scottish Office among ethnic minorities.

Blind People

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total number of registered blind people in Scotland by category. [40033]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The latest complete figures are those for 1995:

Number of persons registered blind and partially sighted: Scotland—1995

	Number registered at 31 March (include those registered as new cases)					
	Blind			*Partially sighted*		
Age (as at 31 March or date of registration)	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Under 5 years	97	201	298	55	78	133
5–15	128	110	238	87	85	172

Number of persons registered blind and partially sighted: Scotland—1995

Age (as at 31 March or date of registration)	Number registered at 31 March (include those registered as new cases) Blind			Partially sighted		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
16–29	301	213	514	214	145	359
30–49	873	665	1,538	403	365	768
50–64	942	836	1,778	412	399	811
65–74	1,197	1,530	2,727	544	810	1,354
75 and over	4,047	9,984	14,301	1,530	4,224	5,754
All ages—total	7,585	13,539	21,124	3,245	6,106	9,351

Prisons (Hepatitis)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps are being taken to monitor the levels of hepatitis B and C within prisons in Scotland; how many inmates in the prison system have hepatitis B and C; what guidance his Department gives for the treatment of prisoners with hepatitis B and C; what measures are being taken to minimise the spread of hepatitis B and C within Scottish prisons; and if he will make a statement. [39891]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 15 October 1996:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your question about the steps taken by the Scottish Prison Service to deal with hepatitis B and C within prisons in Scotland.

The Scottish Prison Service encourages inmates at risk of hepatitis B and C (principally those who have been involved in intravenous drug misuse) to come forward for voluntary testing on a confidential basis. For that reason it is not possible to state how many prisoners are infected with hepatis B and/or C. In a survey of 14 establishments in April 1995, however, there had been 48 positive results for hepatitis B out of 264 blood tests carried out in the previous year on prisoners at risk. The records of a sample of known intravenous drug users recently admitted to prison were also scrutinised. Ten per cent of the 165 prisoners involved were known to be hepatitis B positive, 47% were negative while for 43% the hepatitis status was not known. As regards hepatitis C, in Shotts Prison (with 465 adult male prisoners), 21 prisoners sought tests between January and July this year, of which 13 were positive (2 being confirmations of earlier tests). In Cornton Vale prison (for females) over the same period 27 out of 40 tests for hepatitis C were positive. For hepatitis B 6 tests out of 29 were positive.

Immunisation against hepatitis B is available to prisoners and support treatments are provided as appropriate by prison medical officers, including the use of Interferon if required. The Medical Adviser to the SPS will shortly be issuing guidance to prison medical officers based on best practice in the NHS.

Information is provided to prisoners through leaflets and clinics. As part of a wider hygiene initiative, disinfectant tablets are available to all prisoners for cleaning utensils. So far as is known these tablets will also kill hepatitis B and C.

NHS Funds

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the reasons for delaying further reconsideration of the Scottish health authorities revenue equalisation—SHARE—formula for distribution of health service funds, with specific reference to rural areas; and when he plans next to have discussions with officials of Highland health board on this matter. [40676]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I anticipate that all health boards will be moved to their SHARE parity position at 1 April 1997. Evaluation of technical aspects of the formula is continually undertaken by my officials. Any proposals for changes to the formula would be subject to consultation with health boards and others at the appropriate time.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Millenium Exhibition

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a progress report on plans for the millenium exhibition funding from the *(a)* public and *(b)* private sectors; and by what date a final decision will be made. [40648]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* This is a matter for the Millenium Commission. I shall reply to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Millenium Festival

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress has been made in preparing for the millennium festival. [37928]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* This is a matter for the Millenium Commission. I shall reply to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

TRANSPORT

Transport Security Director

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has published the 1995-96 annual report of the Director of Transport Security. [40952]

Sir George Young: Copies of this report are available in the Library of the House.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to reduce the level of unpaid maintenance as assessed by the Child Support Agency. [40056]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Frank Field, dated 14 October 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency maintenance assessments.

The Agency is currently in the process of implementing a number of initiatives to further improve the collection of legally due maintenance.

A Debt Management System (DMS) has been trialled in our Plymouth Centre and will be rolled out nationally between January 1997 to March 1997. This will enable the Agency to better identify accounts which fall into arrears and take positive action to progress these cases. The Agency is also enhancing the Child Support Computer System and introducing procedural modifications to help improve compliance.

Various payment methods are used to help minimise debt. The use of deduction of earnings orders (DEOs) where necessary, has proved a very effective method. To further improve the effectiveness of DEOs the Agency has streamlined its procedures to ensure that payment of maintenance starts as soon as possible.

Where a DEO is not appropriate the Agency considers enforcement action such as obtaining a liability order. Also, since May 1996 the Agency has been able to enter debts in the County Court Register of Judgements. This is particularly useful with self-employed absent parents who do not pay their legally due maintenance. It is a powerful incentive to avoid credit blacklisting.

The Agency is also looking at ways of further improving compliance at an early stage by encouraging the use of other payment methods such as direct debit.

Finally, I would like to add that reduction of the outstanding maintenance debt is a high priority for the Agency.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cases deferred by the Child Support Agency following the announcement of 20 December 1994 *(a)* have been taken on by the agency and *(b)* have yet to be taken on. [40059]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Frank Field, dated 14 October 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency cases where take on was deferred in December 1994.

The Agency recommenced take on of these cases in November 1995, in line with the agreement made with the Secretary of State to recommence take on by December 1995. Up to 31 August 1996, 4,845 cases had been taken on by the Agency.

It is not possible to give an exact figure for the number of cases still outstanding. To obtain this a clerical examination of all the deferred cases would have to be made to find those appropriate for action and this would incur disproportionate cost. It is estimated that the number outstanding at 30 June 1996 has reduced to around 190,000 cases.

This reduction is due to a number of reasons. The recommencement of take on mentioned above; also, in some cases where Income Support has ceased and the parent with care has made a fresh application for benefit, the Agency will have become involved and these cases will have been taken on; in other cases the parent with care will have requested that the Agency take on the case and this will have been done; finally, some clients will no longer be claiming Income Support.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number and percentage of women, since the establishment of the Child Support Agency, whose cases have been examined by the Child Support Agency who *(a)* have not named the father, *(b)* are accepted by the agency as not knowing the name of the father and *(c)* claim not to know the name of the father but whose claim has been rejected by the Child Support Agency. [40141]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 14 October 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency cases.
The details that you have requested are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost; there are a number of reasons for this:
Firstly, the Agency does not differentiate absent parents and parents with care by gender; by far the vast majority of parents with care are women, but within those cases where the parent with care has failed to identify the person liable to pay maintenance, there is a small number where the parent with care is male.

Also, when dealing with parents with care and collecting details of absent parents, the Agency encounters very different circumstances and goes through different stages for different cases. The issue of naming the absent parent, and the question of whether the parent with care knows the name of the absent parent are factors that contribute to this process; however, the Agency does not record statistical information in every case on these factors separately.

From the nearest available information in this area, I can tell you that of over 1.3 million cases cleared by the Agency since its launch in April 1993, the number of cases where the failure to name the absent parent, initially at least, has been an issue is estimated to be in the region of 180,000.

I hope this is helpful.

Community Care Grant Appeals

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to accelerate the community care grant appeals procedure; and if he will make a statement. [40236]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Secretary of State has laid down guidance and directions for dealing with a request for a review. We are not aware of any major problems with the current review process.

From 1 April 1996 to 31 July 1996 inclusive the average clearance time for a community care grant review was 13.8 days.

One benefit office in the hon. Member's constituency did have a backlog of reviews outstanding at the end of July. It has since taken action to reduce the arrears in this area of work. Its clearance time for reviews should be showing an improvement and constituents should now be receiving an improved service.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeals in each of the benefit districts in Wales have been lodged against the withdrawal of the reduction in earnings allowance. [40464]

Mr. Roger Evans: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimate his Department has

made of the number of appeals to be made in England and Wales against the withdrawal of the reduced earnings allowance; [40468]

(2) how many additional staff have been employed and how many man hours have been devoted to deal with the outstanding appeals made to date against the withdrawal of the reduced earnings allowance. [40461]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available in the format requested.

It was estimated that approximately 25 per cent. of reduced allowance recipients transferred to retirement allowance following the introduction of amending legislation would appeal against the adjudication officer's decision.

Based on this assumption the cost in staff time for the Benefits Agency is estimated at a total of 15.81 man years. This figure is provisional and may be subject to change.

Offices have been provided with resources accordingly to enable them to deal with the extra work arising from these appeals.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individual appeals against the withdrawal of the reduced earning allowances have been heard; and what percentage of appeals heard have found in favour of the appellants. [40469]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the average cost to an individual who has lost his reduced earnings allowance as a result of recent regulations in each of the benefit districts in Wales. [40467]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available in the format requested.

Reduced earnings allowance recipients who are over pensionable age and who are not in regular employment have been transferred to retirement allowance in accordance with the Social Security (Industrial Injuries and Diseases) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1996, which came into effect on 24 March 1996. The average difference between reduced earnings allowance and retirement allowance is estimated to be around £29.00. This may be offset by additional income-related benefit entitlement for some retirement allowance recipients.

Child Support Departure System

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he proposes to introduce the child support departure system. [40915]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I have today laid draft regulations which, subject to the approval of the House, will provide for the departures system to be phased in nationally from 2 December 1996.

The child support formula assessment is right in the vast majority of cases but the new system will allow scope for discretion in the small proportion of cases where the standard formula is not seen to produce a fair result. The grounds on which a departure application may be made include, for example, property and capital transfers made before April 1993 and high travel costs to maintain contact with the child. Also included are cases where parents are diverting income which would otherwise be available or where their lifestyle is inconsistent with their declared income.

Supported Housing

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the terms of reference of the interdepartmental review of funding of supported housing; and if he will make a statement. [40914]

Mr. Roger Evans: In April, right hon. Friend the Secretary of State consulted on draft regulations to clarify the treatment of service charges in housing benefit. The representations that he received indicated that significant amounts of housing benefit may be being paid in respect of personal services in supported accommodation. He concluded that the sudden withdrawal of this source of income may cause significant difficulties for vulnerable people. Therefore, the proposed amendment was withdrawn and an urgent inter-departmental review commissioned to consider all aspects of the funding of services in supported accommodation. The review's terms of reference are to:

1. Identify and estimate current benefit expenditure on services provided in supported accommodation.
2. Consider the proposed legislation and its implications. In particular, identify and estimate the numbers of people who would have been affected by it.
3. Examine and report upon the current mechanisms for funding and delivery of support services.
4. Identify and report upon alternative mechanisms for funding support services.
5. Examine and support upon where the sustainable balance should lie between Social Security and other funding services, and the implications for the care and housing sectors.

We are seeking a sustainable balance between the various funding sources which ensures that essential support services are properly and appropriately funded whilst securing the most effective and economic resources.

Child Benefit

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children aged *(a)* 16, *(b)* 17, *(c)* 18 and *(d)* 19 years in receipt of child benefit attend (i) school, (ii) sixth form college, (iii) tertiary college, (iv) further education college and (v) the youth training scheme. [30139]

Mr. Burt *[pursuant to his reply, 22 May 1996, Official Report, c. 290]:* The information that I gave regarding the number of 17-year-olds undergoing youth training was incorrect. The correct information is as follows.

The information is not available in the format requested. Child benefit data are not available on the nature of the education being undertaken, and education data have no regard to the receipt or otherwise of child benefit. The figures are therefore not directly comparable. However, child benefit is not payable for any young person undergoing a youth training course, and all

entitlement ceases at the 19th birthday. Available data on the number of 16, 17 and 18–year–olds for whom child benefit is paid, and the number in education and training are in the tables:

Number of children for whom child benefit is paid

	Number
16 year olds	577,100
17 year olds	400,700
18 year olds	177,600

Educational establishments attended by 16 to 18–year–olds

	16–year–olds	*17–year–olds*	*18–year–olds*
Schools	246,000	175,000	19,000
Sixth form colleges	53,000	40,000	10,000
Tertiary colleges	35,000	30,000	13,000
Further education	125,000	112,000	74,000
Youth training	69,000	76,000	40,000

DEFENCE

Precision Guided Missiles

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reports he has received that parts for the ISC-Ferranti precision guided missile were to be supplied by South Africa; what action his Department took as a result of such reports; and if he will make a statement. [40210]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The hon. Member will recall that he raised this issue in a letter that he sent to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister dated 5 November 1994.

The Prime Minister's reply of 24 November stated that the papers that the hon. Member had forwarded with his letter did not provide any evidence of breaches in UK import or export controls. I have nothing to add to this.

Biological Weapons (Iran)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the biological weapons capacity of Iran. [40506]

Mr. Soames: Iran has a developed biotechnology industry which would be capable of sustaining a biological warfare research programme. For this reason, it is a cause for concern that Iran, though a state party to the biological and toxin weapons convention since 1973, has not offered to submit to the UN centre for disarmament affairs any confidence-building and transparency declarations.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has to add a gynaecologist to the medical team examining British service men and ex-service men and their partners who are suffering prolonged illness following service in the Gulf war. [40496]

Mr. Soames: It is not intended to add a gynaecologist to the medical team running the Department's medical assessment programme. If a consultant gynaecological opinion is required, this will be obtained through the usual medical referral procedure.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research in collaboration with the United States Institute of Medicine has been funded by his Department into Gulf war syndrome. [40497]

Mr. Soames: The United States Government are funding a range of studies into Gulf health issues, including one in the United Kingdom by Dr. Simon Wessely of King's college medical school. I shall be announcing the final selection of research projects to be funded by my Department, as recommended by the Medical Research Council, in November.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to compensate victims of Gulf war syndrome; and if he will make a statement. [40557]

Mr. Soames: Those who served in the Gulf war have the same legal right of compensation against the Ministry of Defence as civilian workers have against MOD or any other employer. Any Gulf veterans who can be shown to be suffering from illness caused by negligence on the part of my Department will be entitled to compensation in line with common law principles. However, no such compensation claims have yet been pursued by lawyers for claimants, although a list of over a thousand names of potential claimants has been lodged with MOD. This list gives the symptoms or disease claimed to have been experienced by each person since the Gulf war, without specific allegations of negligence.

Gulf War Clean-up Operations

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British troops were involved with United States forces in the clean-up operations near Al-Nasiriyah in 1991 following the Gulf war. [40498]

Mr. Soames: Our records indicate that no British troops were involved in the US Army's activities in the Al-Nasiriyah area after the Gulf war.

Operation Granby

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which British forces served directly with the US Army's 37 Engineer Battalion during Operation Granby. [40499]

Mr. Soames: We have no record of any British forces serving directly with the US Army's 37th Engineer Battalion during Operation Granby.

Gulf War Publications

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which sections of the text of the recent book on the Gulf war by Major-General Patrick Cordingley, were amended by his Department on submission of the draft text for clearance; and if he will list the reasons for the removal of sections of the submitted text. [40505]

Mr. Soames: Minor changes to Major-General Cordingley's manuscript were agreed in order to protect confidentiality and national security.

Military Bases (Pollution)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies have been commissioned by his Department into *(a)* the degree of contamination and *(b)* the prospects for remedial action at (i) military bases in the United Kingdom and (ii) dependent territories abroad. [40426]

Mr. Soames: Within the United Kingdom my Department is introducing a procedure of land quality assessment to establish the condition of individual sites on the defence estate and where appropriate make recommendations for and implementation of remediation. Given the extent of the defence estate a prioritised programme for this work is being drawn up. For dependent territories abroad, a similar land quality assessment process is being adopted, where this meets the requirements of the host country.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received this year from the Celtic League concerning the environmental consequences of pollution at and leakages from existing and retired military bases in the United Kingdom. [40427]

Mr. Soames: None. The league has asked for environmental information about UK military bases, but it has not yet confirmed that it would be prepared to meet any MOD administrative costs for researching the information due under the Environmental Information Regulations 1992.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies his Department has commissioned on the levels of *(a)* toxic and *(b)* other pollution at military bases in Wales; and what publications his Department has issued in this respect over the past 12 months. [40518]

Mr. Soames: My Department is introducing a procedure of land quality assessment to establish the condition of individual sites and detect the presence of contaminants on the defence estate, and where appropriate make recommendations for and implementation of remediation. Given the extent of the defence estate, a prioritised programme for this work is being drawn up. Land quality assessment work is being undertaken at the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency sites at Aberporth, Llanbedr and Pendine, and an assessment of RAF Caerwent was commissioned on 4 October 1996.

My Department has not issued any publications about the level of contamination at military sites in Wales during the last 12 months.

HMS Royal Oak

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the potential environmental threat from the seepage of oil from the wreck of HMS Royal Oak at Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands. [40428]

Mr. Soames: My Department has taken urgent steps to remove the environmental threat to Scapa Flow posed by oil leaking from a small area of the wreck of HMS Royal Oak. The leak has been sealed, and the small quantity of oil which had come ashore prior to this action has been removed.

Landfill Tax

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultation his Department has undertaken with Her Majesty's Customs and Excise over the implementation of the landfill tax; and if he will make a statement. [40429]

Mr. Soames: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise have kept my Department informed of the plans to implement the landfill tax. As the MOD and its agencies do not operate any landfill sites, we do not except to pay direct landfill tax charges.

Submarines

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many submarines are now assessed to be surplus to requirements; and what plans exist for their disposal. [40551]

Mr. Arbuthnot: There are currently six diesel–electric submarines surplus to the Royal Navy's requirements: four Upholder class and two Oberon class boats. The four Upholder class submarines are currently being marketed for sale or lease to a number of friendly countries. The Oberon class boats are in the hands of a commercial residual asset manager who is stripping them of reusable components before the hulls are sold for breaking.

Eleven nuclear-powered submarines have been withdrawn from service. Our current policy is that decommissioned nuclear-powered submarines should be stored safely afloat at the location where they are decommissioned, pending disposal. We envisage final disposal, early next century, in the deep repository currently being developed by Nirex.

Deysbrook Barracks, Liverpool

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Deysbrook barracks site in Liverpool. [40552]

Mr. Soames: It is planned to redeploy the Regular Army units currently occupying Deysbrook barracks to other locations. The majority of the site will therefore no longer be required by my Department, and will be disposed of within the next four years. A small enclave will, however, be retained as a Territorial Army centre to house the Territorial Army and cadet units currently using the barracks.

Private Simon Jeans

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the murder of Private Simon Jeans serving with IFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina. [40556]

Mr. Soames: Private Simon Jeans of the Royal Logistics Corps was attacked in Split, Croatia, on 7 September this year. Sadly, he died of his injuries 10 days later, having been medically evacuated to the UK. Her Majesty's Government are very saddened by this vicious and senseless act, and offer our most heartfelt sympathies to his family.

Criminal proceedings are progressing against four Croatian youths. Every assistance has been, and will continue to be, given to the Croatian civil police to bring the perpetrators of this dreadful crime to justice.

Trilateral Defence Agreement

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the trilateral defence agreement with Poland and Ukraine. [40559]

Mr. Soames: I met the Polish and Ukrainian Defence Ministers in Poland on 2 and 3 September. We agreed to institute a regular process of trilateral meetings and to develop a programme of trilateral defence co-operation. Within this framework, we are examining the possibility of UK assistance to the joint Polish-Ukrainian peacekeeping battalion and of joint training exercises.

Unexploded Bombs

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information his Department *(a)* holds and *(b)* has assessed in respect of unexploded bombs in London; how many unexploded bombs are estimated to exist in each London authority area; how many bombs are officially listed; what is the estimated risk associated with these; what contact his Department has had with planners, surveyors or their representative groups in this matter; and what contact his Department has had with planners, surveyors or their representative groups in this matter; and what action is planned to deal with the situation. [40563]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member.

Services Sound and Vision Corporation

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's relationship with the Services Sound and Vision Corporation. [40946]

Mr. Soames: The Services Sound and Vision Corporation is a registered charity and also a company limited by guarantee which supplies a range of goods and services to my Department and to other customers. It does not carry out any function of government as such. It is classified as a non-departmental public body sponsored by my Department because most of its income has derived from work which was automatically placed by my Department with the corporation on a non-profit basis, and the Ministry of Defence is represented by trustees in the higher organisation of the corporation. However, this arrangement has not provided MOD with the kind of control that it is appropriate for sponsoring Departments to exercise over their NDPBs. It has been decided that best value for money would be obtained if the relevant goods and services were obtained by normal contractual means. My Department intends, subject to any responses to the minute that it laid before Parliament on 14 October 1996, that all future work done for it by SSVC should be conducted under contract.

MOD's proposed contractual relationship with SSVC would be the same as its relationship with any commercial supplier, so it would be inappropriate for the corporation to retain its status as a NDPB. Therefore, subject to signing of the proposed contracts, it is intended that SSVC's NDPB status shall be revoked.

In order to prepare for the proposed new relationship with MOD, SSVC reviewed its activities. As a result of this, the corporation decided not to compete for some types of work that it previously undertook for MOD. This decision, and restructuring to enable it to compete for other types of MOD work, led to the need to reduce the SSVC work force by some 25 per cent. or about 200 posts. My Department has honoured its consequential liabilities towards SSVC by funding the restructuring costs, which mainly consisted of redundancy payments.

Another effect of the new relationship between MOD and SSVC concerns residual contingent liabilities. MOD would, under the proposed contractual relationship, retain some liabilities arising from the NDPB arrangement. This is explained in greater detail in the minute laid before Parliament to earlier.

With the removal of SSVC's NDPB status there would be no reason for MOD to continue to be represented in the corporation's higher organisation and, given the new contractual relationship between MOD and SSVC, it would be preferable for the practice to end as soon as possible.

Following the restructuring of SSVC and the removal of its NDPB status, the corporation should be able to operate more efficiently and with greater freedom than in the past. Given this, and its expertise in the business activity it will continue to undertake, MOD believes that the corporation should flourish.

Intelligence and Security Centre

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about defence agency status for the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre. [40947]

Mr. Soames: The defence costs study recommended that a single joint services defence intelligence and security training centre with a rationalised management and support structure be formed at one location and that this centre be considered for defence agency status.

Following detailed studies, I have agreed to the formation of the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre as a defence agency on 1 October 1996 at the former RAF Chicksands.

When collocation is complete, the DISC will comprise units formerly based at Ashford and Garats Hay stations, Royal Air Force North Luffenham and Wyton, and HMS Mercury. It will employ approximately 500 staff, comprising military personnel from all three Services and civil servants.

The chief executive will hold executive powers delegated from my Department to allow the agency to fulfil its responsibilities. The chief executive will also be directly accountable to my Department and Parliament for the propriety and regularity of the agency's expenditure, for the adequacy of its financial systems, and for the efficient and economical conduct of its business. I will arrange for copies of the agency's framework document and corporate plan to be placed in the Library of the House.

The aim of the agency is to train the armed forces and other intelligence agencies in intelligence, security and psychological operations disciplines and conduct after

capture to contribute to effective and timely advice to the armed forces on appropriate intelligence and security policy matters, and to maintain an operational capability all in a cost effective manner.

The chief executive has been set the following demanding output and developmental key targets for the first six months of operation, taking into account that units will be moving to Chicksands during this period:

The output targets are:

For training:

to make available to customers an agreed number of planned annual course training days—1,125 days between 1 October 1996 and 31 March 1997, recognising the need to meet any surge requirements within allocated resources.

For advice:

to contribute to formulation of MOD policy on appropriate intelligence, security and psychological operations matters in an efficient and satisfactory manner.

For operations:

to meet the operational tasking to manning levels and performance standards agreed with the owner to the satisfaction of customers.

For development of the DISC, the targets are:

On training:

by 31 March 1997 to evaluate quality control mechanisms across all areas of training including systems of measurement, target setting and customer interface, all in accordance with the systems approach to training and identify any corrective measures necessary.

On advice:

in consultation with the owner and customers, determine a formal assessment mechanism by which the effectiveness of the contribution made by DISC staff to formulation of MOD policy for appropriate intelligence and security matters can be made.

Concerning resource management:

to introduce interim systems for training and financial management in order to produce training information and full cost accrual accounting based resource accounts for the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997, in accordance with the requirements of agency reporting and the accounts direction for trial audit by the National Audit Office.

And also:

to progress the implementation of the planned DISC rationalisation and collocation programme.

All these targets will encourage continuous improvements and efficiencies to intelligence and security training for the armed services and enable the DISC to develop into a cohesive corporate centre of excellence. The bringing together of these units will also enable efficiencies in manpower and support costs to be made and a saving to the defence budget of £5 million per annum once collocation has occurred.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

St. Helena

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the figures for grant in aid for St. Helena for the past five years *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* at constant prices. [40602]

Dr. Liam Fox: The figures are:

£ million

	Cash prices	*Constant prices*
1991–92	3.424	3.827
1992–93	3.479	3.731
1993–94	3.495	3.644
1994–95	3.225	3.303
1995–96	3.805	3.805

Grant in aid, or budgetary aid, is only one element of the UK's wider aid programme to St. Helena.

WALES

Local Government Consultation Paper

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to announce his decisions on the proposals set out in his consultation paper "The Welsh Office and Local Government: Redefining the Relationship", published in March of this year. [41074]

Mr. Hague: I have already announced progress in a number of important areas, including arrangements for the first round of the Welsh capital challenge scheme. However, I have today published a second paper which provides a comprehensive summary of the original proposals and the responses received. It also sets out my decisions on all of the proposals and encourages further dialogue on the question of the Welsh Office's relationship with local government. Copies of the paper have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Second Severn Crossing

Mr. Donald Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will commission a study over an appropriate period of the effect of the second Severn crossing on the economy and employment of south Wales. [40031]

Mr. Hague: I have no such plans. The new crossing represents an opportunity that I believe Welsh businesses will take.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many TB cases there were in Wales in the last available year; and if he will make a statement. [40051]

Mr. Hague: There were 184 notified cases of tuberculosis in Wales in 1995.

Smoking-related Diseases

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people died from smoking-related diseases in each of the last three years. [40047]

Mr. Hague: The available information is as follows. All figures for 1995 are provisional.

The specific category of smoking-related disease is not defined explicitly. Three diseases commonly caused by smoking are: lung cancer, coronary heart disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

The total number of deaths occurring in Wales from lung cancer was 2,017 in 1993, 1,966 in 1994 and 1,864 in 1995. It is likely that smoking would have been a major factor in between 90 and 95 per cent. of these deaths.

The total number of deaths occurring in Wales from coronary heart disease was 9,676 in 1993, 8,611 in 1994 and 8,739 in 1995. The total number of deaths occurring in Wales from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease was 1,802 in 1993, 1,557 in 1994 and 1,990 in 1995. It is likely that smoking would have been a major factor in a significant proportion of these deaths.

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many women from ethnic minorities are employed by his Department and its agencies; at what grade; and what measures he has taken to encourage the *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* employment and *(c)* promotion of women from ethnic minorities within his Department and its agencies. [39900]

Mr. Hague: My Department is committed to increasing the proportion of its staff who come from ethnic minority backgrounds. Outreach programmes have been introduced to encourage recruitment. A programme of action for staff from ethnic minorities has been developed to help identify and overcome any barriers and ensure staff have the opportunity to develop to their full potential.

Statistical information on staff from ethnic minorities is not available in the format requested.

NHS Staff

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many practice managers and practice administrative staff there are in the health service in Wales. [40049]

Mr. Hague: The information is given in the following table.

Whole–time equivalent number of GP practice staff in post

	1 October 1995
Practice managers, including fund managers	440
Other administrative staff[1]	2,463

[1] Secretarial, receptionist, clerical, computer operators and other administrative staff.

Mental Health

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department spends on mental health; what proportion this constitutes of the health budget; and if he will make a statement. [40050]

Mr. Hague: In 1995–96, according to their audited accounts, district health authorities and family health authorities spent £149,880,964 on mental illness services which represented 7.6 per cent. of the total provision spent purchasing health care. This included some £13.8 million allocated by the Department for spending on mental health services.

Road and Economy Studies

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the titles of the studies *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated by his Department during the last 10 years concerning the relationship between economic growth, jobs and road building. [40064]

Mr. Hague: None, but the south Wales area traffic study published in December 1990 and the north-east Clwyd traffic study published in November 1991 looked at traffic levels, traffic growth and future capacity requirements for the road network in those areas of Wales. There is a degree of assessment of potential economic growth associated with such studies. Copies of both reports are in the Library of the House.

Youth Training

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate his Department has made of the average cost of a national vocational qualification acquired through youth training within each of the training and enterprise councils in Wales. [40484]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The following table gives the estimated apportionment of costs, as between national vocational qualifications levels 1 to 4, incurred by the Welsh Office as a result of its contracts with the respective training and enterprise councils in Wales in 1995–96.

Average cost of a national vocational qualification

TEC	*Average—cost per NVQ 1995–96(£)*			
	NVQ1	*NVQ2*	*NVQ3*	*NVQ4*
Mid Glamorgan TEC	4,285	3,658	7,943	8,544
Gwent TEC	3,338	2,604	5,943	6,227
West Wales TEC	3,309	3,022	6,331	6,944
South Glamorgan TEC	4,768	3,709	8,477	8,874
Powys TEC	3,801	2,997	6,798	7,145
Targed	2,983	2,448	5,430	5,775
North East Wales TEC	3,217	2,176	5,393	5,416
Wales	3,751	3,009	6,760	7,141

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate his Department has made of the percentage and number of those aged 19 who have not achieved a national vocational qualification at level 2 or a comparable educational qualification. [40487]

Mr. Evans: The labour force survey for winter 1995–96 estimated that 36,000 or 39 per cent. of 19 to 21-year-olds in Wales had not achieved a national vocational qualification at level 2 or a comparable educational qualification. No reliable figures are available for 19-year-olds separately.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate his Department has made of the amount offered per training week within the youth training scheme by each training and enterprise council; and what proportion of that amount is spent on training. [40485]

Mr. Evans: The Welsh Office does not make estimates of the prices offered by each of the training and enterprise councils in Wales to training providers. The Department contracts with each TEC for a range of services at prices which reflect the nature and volume of service to be provided and take account of the previous year's outturn

performance in terms of comparative unit costs. The TECs in turn contract with training providers and other suppliers at prices which reflect their own commercial judgment as to appropriate levels. These may be above or below those paid by the Department.

School Leavers

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the percentage of school leavers who have entered work without recognised training or further education. [40486]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is not collected by the Welsh Office. However, the Wales Association of Heads of Careers Companies has published figures showing that, of 16-year-olds in Wales in 1995, approximately 5 per cent. entered employment without any planned training.

Effluent Treatment Plants

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions since 1 January 1990 consent conditions applied to effluent treatment plants in Wales have been contravened; and what steps have been taken to remedy the pollution. [40525]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer the hon. Member to tables 13.1 to 13.3 in the "Environmental Digest for Wales No. 9 1996" published by the Welsh Office, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Under the Water Resources Act 1991 and the Environment Act 1995, the Environment Agency has a wide range of powers to tackle aquatic pollution.

Drinking Water

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the compliance of provision of public drinking water supplies in Wales with the 1985 World Health Organisation guidelines on drinking water quality. [40520]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The national standards for public drinking water supplies are prescribed by the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989, SI 1989 No. 1147. These incorporate the standards of the EC Drinking Water Directive, 80/778/EEC, which in turn are based in many cases on the 1984 World Health Organisation guidelines for drinking water quality. Information on compliance in Wales with the regulations is contained in the annual reports published by the chief inspector of the drinking water inspectorate, copies of which are held in the Library of the House.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the progress of implementation since June 1992 of Agenda 21 for sustainable development in Wales. [40517]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Information on the progress made in Wales toward achieving sustainable development in Wales will be included in "The Environment in Wales—Fifth Report", which will be published in the next few weeks by the Welsh Office. I will arrange for copies of the report to be sent to the hon. Member and to be placed in the Library of the House.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent representations have been received in respect of the effect on sites of special scientific interest in wales of airborne and aquatic discharge from *(a)* power plants and *(b)* agri-farming. [40515]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: None.

Water Pollution

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* major *(b)* significant *(c)* minor and *(d)* unsubstantiated water pollution incidents have been (i) notified and (ii) suspected in Wales in each year since the coming into force of the Water Resources Act 1991; how many prosecution have resulted and what punitive or remedial action has been taken in each case. [40522]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the annual reports published by the Environment Agency and its predecessor the National Rivers Authority on "Water Pollution incidents in England and Wales", copies of which are held in the Library of the House.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions since the coming into force of the Water Resources Act 1991 the environmental protection authorities in Wales have dropped a prosecution against an alleged polluter where the incident was notified during the investigation as a category 1 or category 2 case. [40523]

Mr. Evans: The policy of the Environment Agency and previously the National Rivers Authority is to prosecute category 1 pollution incidents where there is adequate evidence to support the case. The policy for category 2 incidents is less rigid and allows for the use of formal cautions or warning letters where appropriate. Information on prosecutions under the Water Resources Act 1991 that have been dropped by the authority and the agency is not held centrally.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the meetings he has had in the past 12 months with the head of the Welsh region of the National Rivers Authority and the Welsh divisional office of the Environment Agency to discuss the effectiveness of the application of legislation to protect drinking water sources from pollution; and if he will indicate the outcome of each meeting. [40524]

Mr. Evans: Officials of the Environment Agency, and previously the National Rivers Authority, including the Welsh regional general manager, meet regularly with officials of the Welsh Office to discuss a range of matters relating to the functions of the agency and the authority. My right hon. Friend is advised on the carrying out of these functions by committees which have been established under section 6 of the Water Resources Act 1991 and section 11 of the Environment Act 1995 and annual reports are placed in the Library of the House.

Homelessness

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the level of homelessness in Wales; and what steps he is taking to alleviate the problem. [40516]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I am very pleased that the level of homelessness in Wales continues to fall significantly. The recently published "Welsh Housing Statistics 1996", a copy of which is in the Library, recorded a fall in accepted cases of homelessness of 13 per cent. to 9,000 in 1995 and the proportion of priority acceptances at 65 per cent of this figure is the lowest recorded level since 1978.

We have a range of policies and initiatives in place in Wales to assist authorities in tackling homelessness and clearly these are working.

Bullying

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provisions exist to assist schoolchildren in Wales to combat bullying. [40521]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: As part of the Government's commitment to tackling issues of school discipline, we have made available funding of £925,000 under this year's grant for education support and training programme for specific projects aimed at reducing truancy and improving classroom discipline generally. However, primary responsibility for measures to combat and deal with bullying rests with schools themselves supported by local education authorities.

All schools should establish their own anti-bullying policy as part of their overall policy on pupil behaviour and discipline.

We will be bringing forward a package of measures to improve school discipline in the Education Bill which we will be introducing in the next session of Parliament.

Urban Investment Grant Scheme

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the urban investment grant scheme will be transferred to the Welsh Development Agency; and if he will make a statement. [41073]

Mr. Hague: Transfer of responsibility for the urban investment grant—UIG—scheme was deferred from 1 April to 1 October 1996 to allow the WDA not only to administer new projects but to act as my agent for existing UIG agreements and for projects where grant was approved subject to the successful conclusion of a legal agreement falling within the WDA's statutory powers. This increased level of responsibility was made possible through section 130 of the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, which came into force on 25 September. I appointed the WDA to be my agent in relation to these matters from 1 October 1996.

Also from 1 October 1996, for new business, I have asked the WDA to offer incentives similar to those previously available under the Welsh Office's UIG scheme to promote the economic regeneration of derelict land and buildings in urban areas. For 1996–97, £3.882 million will be transferred to the WDA to fund on-going and new projects.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear Test Ban

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of discussions at the United Nations General Assembly on a nuclear test ban; and if he will place in the Library a copy of all speeches made by representatives of the United Kingdom Government to the UNGA on a test ban since 1 September. [39918]

Mr. David Davis: A resolution adopting the comprehensive test ban treaty was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 September 1996, with the support of 158 states. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs set out the Government's position in his statement to the United Nations General Committee on 24 September, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

European Youth Foundation

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries currently contribute towards the budget of the European Youth Foundation. [40180]

Mr. David Davis: The following countries have undertaken to contribute towards the current budget of the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe:

Albania
Andorra
Austria
Belgium
Greece
Hungary
Iceland
Ireland
Norway
Poland
Portugal
Romania.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British youth groups, apart from the scouting movement, presently benefit from the work of the European Youth Foundation. [40178]

Mr. Davis: About 70 British youth groups in 1996, apart from the Scout Association, have benefited directly or indirectly from European Youth Foundation grants made to their respective international umbrella youth organisations.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans his Department has to *(a)* reduce and *(b)* end the United Kingdom's contribution to the European Youth Foundation. [40177]

Mr. Davis: We have given the requisite 12 months notice to cease contributing our annual endowment to the European Youth Foundation with effect from 1 January 1997. Our 1996 contribution has been paid in full.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the saving to public funds when his Department withdraws its financial support to the European Youth Foundation. [40181]

Mr. Davis: We estimate that our withdrawal from the European Youth Foundation will save the public purse about £325,000 per annum.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many countries currently contribute towards the funding of the European Youth Foundation. [40179]

Mr. Davis: Thirty-six countries have undertaken to contribute to the current budget of the European Youth Foundation.

Nuclear Safety Agreement

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations his Department had with the United States State Department about the memorandum of agreement on co-operation concerning nuclear safety and security it signed with France on 4 June; and if he will make a statement. [40280]

Mr. David Davis: None.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received from the US State Department a copy of the memorandum of agreement on co-operation concerning nuclear safety and security which France entered into with the United States on 4 June; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [40276]

Mr. Davis: No. Bilateral co-operation between the United States and France is a matter for the Governments concerned.

Eastern Europe (Nuclear Weapons)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the implications for the stipulations of articles (i) and (ii) of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty over the transfer of nuclear weapons and nuclear know-how of negotiations to increase the membership of NATO with eastern European states; and if he will make a statement. [40519]

Mr. David Davis: None. Articles I and II of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty do not prevent the stationing of nuclear weapons on the territory of non-nuclear weapon states, but the alliance made clear last year that there was no *a priori* requirement for the stationing of nuclear weapons on the territory of new members, and that the present NATO nuclear posture would for the foreseeable future continue to meet the requirements of an enlarged alliance.

St. Helena

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 June *Official Report,* column *566,* relating to the dismissal of a teacher in St. Helena, if the notification was received from the Governor operating in his personal capacity. [40603]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The teacher in question resigned from her post. She was not dismissed. There is therefore no relevance in this case to the Governor's reserved powers.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for how many days in 1996 the Governor of St. Helena has been resident on St. Helena. [40600]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: During 1996, the Governor has been resident on St. Helena for the whole year except for 30 days spent travelling to and from St. Helena's dependencies on duty, and 76 days travelling to and from the UK for consultations in London and leave. St. Helena's Chief Secretary was appointed to administer the Government during the Governor's absences.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the figure for unemployment in percentage term on St. Helena at 1 January 1996; what is the latest figure; if he will make a statement. [40601]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The percentage of people seeking full-time employment at the end of December 1995 was 15 per cent. of the on-island work force. The latest equivalent figure available—for August 1996—is 18 per cent. We are working with the St. Helena Government to develop the island's economy to create new employment opportunities and to alleviate the unemployment situation on St. Helena.

Secretary-General of the United Nations

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of the post of UN Secretary-General. [40562]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: It is the Government's long-standing policy not to reveal their voting intentions for the election of the United Nations Secretary-General.

Private Simon Jeans

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Croatian Government in respect of the murder of Private Simon Jeans serving with IFOR; if compensation is being claimed from Croatia; and if he will make a statement. [40555]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have made clear our grave concern at the incident leading to the tragic death of Private Simon Jeans. The Croatian authorities have arrested and charged with manslaughter four people in connection with his death. They are due to appear in court in Croatia on 23 October. British IFOR commanders remain in very close contact with the Croatian authorities. It is for the family of Private Simon Jeans to consider claiming compensation once the outcome of the Croatian authorities' investigation is known. The broader question of UK criminal injuries compensation for service men and women killed in the former Yugoslavia is being examined by the Government.

BBC World Service

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the joint FCO-BBC World Service working group report on the implications for the future of the BBC World Service of the BBC's restructuring proposals. [40916]

Mr. Rifkind: The chairman of the BBC and I met on 14 October to consider the report of the joint FCO/BBC World Service working group. We have accepted its conclusions.

I am encouraged that the working group has agreed a series of 20 new proposals designed to ensure the continued protection of World Service interests and the maintenance of the special character, style, ethos and quality of World Service broadcasts.

The working group will reconvene in the autumn of 1997 to review the effects of the World Service of the implementation of the BBC's restructuring proposals to ensure that the new measures agreed by the working group are functioning satisfactorily and producing the desired results.

The Government remain committed to the success of the World Service, to the maintenance of the high quality of its output, and to its continued pre-eminence among international broadcasters.

I have placed copies of the full report of the working group in the Libraries of both Houses.

A summary of the measures agreed by the working group is as follows:

SUMMARY OF MEASURES AGREED

In the course of its discussions the working group considered a number of measures designed to ensure the continued protection of World Service interests under the restructuring proposals put forward by the BBC. The following are the principal measures agreed with respect to financial and economic issues, the maintenance of the quality of World Service news and other programmes including management issues, and the FCO/World Service relationship.

Financial and economic

(i) BBC to draw up new guidelines to govern the trading relationship between World Service and BBC supplier departments. These will be subject to periodic internal review, independent external monitoring and an effective financial penalty clause. Guidelines to be approved by NAO.

(ii) Financial mechanisms to be developed to ensure proper allocation of the cost of overseas correspondents.

(iii) The FCO/BBC financial memorandum to be redrafted to incorporate new financial mechanisms.

(iv) The BBC's fair trading guidelines to be revised to incorporate the commitment that FCO-grant in aid funds cannot be used for non-World Service purposes.

(v) NAO to examine the functioning of the new financial mechanisms after six months of operation.

(vi) Arrangement for appointing the Accounting Officer of the World Service to be re-examined in separate discussions between FCO and BBC.

(vii) Proposals for alternative methods of managing World Service Capital Assets to be examined in separate discussions between FCO and the BBC.

(viii) BBC proposals on future savings to be considered further when all necessary information is available.

Quality

News and current affairs programmes

(ix) World Service news and real-time current affairs programmes to be produced by a dedicated unit within BBC News co-located with the World Service including the vernacular services. Dedicated team members to be appointed for a period of time agreed with World Service.

(x) World Service to specify additional competencies and training for staff working on the supply of such programmes and services.

(xi) World Service programme commissioners to have full editorial responsibility rooted in the power to specify the agenda, range and breadth of news programmes and services as well as their style, content and distinctive voice. There would also be provision for an internal review process with, in cases of disagreement, referral to senior management up to the director general. The board of governors to be made aware of any such referrals. This internal review process to feed into the BBC's annual performance review by the Director General to the Chairman and Board of Governors.

(xii) World Service to be represented on all senior appointment boards of significance to the provision of World Service output. All appointments concerned to be jointly agreed. World Service to approve individual presenters for all key programmes.

(xiii) World Service to have the right within the specification agreed between World Service and BBC News to require programming to cover particular events or to respond to breaking news.

Newsgathering

(xiv) World Service to have power to require that strategic deployment of newsgathering resources including geographical spread is appropriate to range and breadth of World Service needs. Correspondents' assignment briefs to spell out their responsibilities to World Service.

Co-location

(xv) Co-location between the team producing World Service news and current affairs programmes and the vernacular services to be given top priority. Any period of separation to be kept to a minimum and entered upon only if and when the World Service has agreed that the advantages significantly outweighed the disadvantages.

General programmes

(xvi) BBC to ensure that staff of BBC Production are fully briefed and trained on special requirements of World Service and that there are regular interchanges of staff.

(xvii) Programme commissioners to have extensive powers to specify target audience, strategic objectives, style and content of programmes as well as wide freedom to commission as they see fit from within and outside BBC.

Management

(xviii) Managing Director World Service to attend meetings of BBC executive committee whenever World Service issues are to be discussed. World Service to be represented on BBC executive committee by the deputy director general.

(xix) BBC to strengthen oversight of World Service by BBC board of governors, including the establishment of new procedures to approve strategy and review performance and to ensure that any disagreements between World Service commissioners and BBC production are made known to the governors. An independent advisory panel to be established under the chairmanship of a BBC governor to advise the governors on World Service output and performance.

FCO/World Service relationship

(xx) The World Service's relationship with the FCO to remain unaffected by the restructuring.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Firearms

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many new gun licences have been issued in England and Wales since 1 January. [40113]

Miss Widdecombe: Statistics on firearm and shotgun licences are collected centrally only on an annual basis. Statistics for 1996 will be published in the spring of 1997.

Sir Michael Sheresby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many deaths occurred as the result of shooting in which unregistered and illegally held firearms was used during each of the past 10 years; [40322]

(2) in how many cases during the past 10 years police officers in England and Wales have been killed by a registered firearm used *(a)* by the licence holder and *(b)* by a third party; [40320]

(3) how many deaths have occurred in each of the past 10 years as a result of gunshot wounds in which a registered firearm was used *(a)* by the holder of the firearms licence and *(b)* by an unauthorised third party; [40319]

(4) in how many cases during the past 10 years police officers in England and Wales have been killed by an unregistered and illegally held firearm. [40321]

Miss Widdecombe: Information as to whether firearms used in offences of homicide are legally held is not at present routinely collected centrally.

However, a special exercise has been recently carried out to find out whether the guns used in homicide were licensed or not.

This covered the years 1992 to 1994, and out of a total of 196 homicides, information was available in 152 cases to show that 22 cases—14 per cent.—involved the use of a legally held firearm. In 5 per cent. of homicides in which the weapons were not legally held by a suspect, the weapons were believed to have been stolen—seven out of 130. For 88 of these offences, however, the police reported that they did not know whether the firearm had been stolen or not.

During the period of the survey, one police officer and one special constable were shot and killed, the firearms being illegally held.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many notifiable offences were recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used in Wales in 1995. [40052]

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not yet available for 1995, but is due for publication in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 1995" on 7 November.

Emergencies

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which bodies have statutory duties for and what statutory bodies have responsibilities for providing emergency assistance to *(a)* those trapped in vehicles after road accidents, *(b)* householders or owners of commercial or industrial premises who have been subject to unexpected flooding and *(c)* persons trapped in lifts, when no local assistance is able to release them, giving in each case how the bodies are funded for such activities. [40362]

Mr. Sackville: Under section 1 of the Fire Services Act 1947, a fire authority has a duty to make provision for firefighting purposes, and in particular to secure the services of a fire brigade and equipment in order to meet efficiently all normal requirements. Section 3(1)(e) of the 1947 Act gives a fire authority supplementary powers to employ its brigade for purposes other than firefighting, such as those referred to in the question. The police service has no statutory responsibility or duty as such to provide assistance in respect of such incidents, although it may well do so in practice. The role of the ambulance service is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. Fire authorities are financed from council tax, national non-domestic rates and revenue support grant.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to make an announcement regarding the future of section 11 funding; which and what percentage of projects currently in operation will be guaranteed funding until March 1998; and if he will make a statement. [40582]

Mr. Kirkhope: We have under active consideration the position regarding further section 11 funding from next April onwards. Although we are not yet in a position to make an announcement, I expect to be able to do so shortly.

Betting

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to change the law in relation to betting on the national lottery; and if he will make a statement. [40771]

Mr. Kirkhope: There are no plans at present to change the law in relation to betting on the national lottery.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of the consultation on the deregulation of casinos, bingo clubs and advertising of commercial gambling. [41077]

Mr. Kirkhope: On 27 February, we went out to consultation on a package of measures to relax certain controls on casinos, bingo clubs and advertising of commercial gambling. This is a general report on the outcome of that consultation and our plans for taking the changes forward.

Casinos

The deregulation proposals received general support. I have laid a draft deregulation order today for Parliamentary scrutiny;

- allowing casinos in England and Wales to sell alcohol up to 2 am (3 am in London);
- reducing the waiting period for casino membership from 48 to 24 hours.

I also plan to lay a draft order later this year allowing payment by debit cards in casinos and bingo clubs.

I hope in the next few weeks to publish a consultation document about the precise form of the deregulation orders allowing:

postal applications for membership;

group membership;

limited advertising;

casino slot machines.

Permitted areas for casinos

In February we proposed to allow casinos in 13 new locations. The new areas attracted support from their local councils, with the exception of Croydon and Peterborough. I intend to finalise that list in the light of the comments received.

We have also received representations from other areas. I do not think it appropriate to add an unmanageable number or to depart radically from the original proposals, but I am considering the case for some additions. New permitted areas can be implemented by secondary legislation, but I will need to address the resource, timing and other practical implications before any are introduced. I will make my intentions clear in the next few weeks.

Bingo

There has been a mixed response from inside and outside the industry to the proposals to abolish the demand criterion for bingo licence applications, the requirement to operate as clubs and the 24 hour waiting period for membership. In the light of the representations received I do not propose to proceed with those measures.

I am still assessing the detailed responses to the other proposals affecting bingo clubs. I will give priority to a measure abolishing advertising restrictions and will then examine further the move to three yearly licences. I would also like to allow simplified charging in bingo clubs, subject to advice from the Gaming Board following discussions with the industry.

Advertising betting shops

I also plan later in the year to bring forward a measure allowing non-broadcast advertising of betting shops.

R *v.* Preddy

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action the Government intend to take to deal with the effect of the judgment of the House of Lords in the case of R *v.* Preddy. [41078]

Mr. Howard: The Law Commission has today published report No. 243, "Offences of Dishonesty: Money Transfers", in which it examines the implications of the House of Lords judgment in R *v.* Preddy, building on its earlier work on its report No. 228, "Conspiracy to Defraud". The Government accept the law Commission's recommendations, and will introduce legislation to give effect to its proposals at the earliest possible opportunity.

Immigration

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his plans for the reintroduction of compulsory application forms for foreign nationals wishing to apply for leave to remain in the United Kingdom following the suspension of the scheme on 6 June. [41079]

Mr. Kirkhope: The compulsory application forms system introduced on 3 June was suspended after three days following legal challenge. Having heard the arguments, we were persuaded that it was right to make changes and the forms have therefore been revised to take account of the issues raised. Copies of the newly prescribed versions have been placed in the Library. The new forms will be compulsory for applications made on or after 25 November. As before, the scheme does not cover applications under European Community law or applications for asylum.

Application forms are designed to help applicants and to improve efficiency. They set out the basic information that an applicant must provide. The compulsory forms scheme is being introduced following a successful 12 months pilot scheme which demonstrated a clear demand for application forms. During the pilot scheme applicants showed themselves willing and able to use the forms and where forms were used applications were resolved more quickly and the need to make further inquiries was greatly reduced. Application forms benefit the applicant, the immigration system and the taxpayer. They are being introduced in order to demonstrate the high priority the Government attach to a fair and efficient manner of immigration control.

Criminal Justice (Delays)

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what work is in hand to reduce delay in the criminal justice process. [40180]

Mr. Howard: Following the report of the royal commission on criminal justice and the efficiency scrutiny of administrative burdens on the police, efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice process have been taken forward by officials from my Department, the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Crown Prosecution Service through the trial issues group. Nevertheless, my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and I believe that it is now appropriate to explore additional means of reducing the time that it takes to deal with cases. We have therefore set up a review urgently to identify means of expediting the progress of criminal cases from initiation to resolution, consistently with the interests of justice. The review will examine the scope for improvements within current structures as well as those which might require new legislation. We expect a report next January.

Asylum and Immigration Act 1996

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* communications and *(b)* consultations have taken place on the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 and instruments made under it, with the Commission of the European Communities and with member states under Commission decision 88/384/EEC and article 118 of the EC treaty; on what dates; by what means; and if he will place in the Library the documents concerned. [40509]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* None. These matters are covered by the arrangements for intergovernmental co-operation under title VI of the treaty on European Union.

Police (Health and Safety)

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to introduce legislation to provide that police officers will be covered by health and safety requirements; [40232]

(2) when he expects the ad hoc working group on health and safety management in the police service to complete its work; [40230]

(3) when he plans to produce his Department's advice in the form of a Home Office circular on health and safety in the police force. [40231]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* I have today announced the Government's proposals to amend the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and the corresponding Northern Ireland legislation so that it extends to the work of police officers, police cadets and special constables. The ad hoc working group on the management of health and safety in the police service has completed the first phase of its work. We have today issued to police forces in the United Kingdom practical guidance on the application of the health and safety legislation to the duties of police officers. A copy of this guidance has been placed in the Library.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Intervention Board

Mr. Mans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how the Intervention Board performed against its targets for 1995–96; and what key performance targets Agriculture Ministers have set the agency for 1996–97. [40948]

Mr. Baldry: The information is as follows:

1995–96

	Target	*Performance*
Percentage of claims processed within deadlines	98.5 per cent.	99.9 per cent.
Percentage of claims processed correctly	98.5 per cent.	99.2 per cent.
Cumulative running cost efficiency gains	2.5 per cent.	3.3 per cent.
Improvement in index of productivity	6.0 per cent.	3.9 per cent.
Ratio of disallowance to EAGGF funds handled	0.4 per cent.	[1]—
To maintain expenditure within vote provision, cash and running cost limited	—	Met
New value for money savings in procurement of goods and services	6.0 per cent.	8.8 per cent.
Yield: cost ratio of anti-fraud activities	3.0:1.0	3.7:1.0

[1] A decision covering the clearance of the 1993 EAGGF accounts is still awaited.

In agreement with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, I have set the following targets for 1996–97:

	Target
Percentage of claims processed within deadlines	99.0 per cent.
Percentage of claims processed correctly	98.5 per cent.
Cumulative running cost efficiency gains	2.5 per cent.
Improvement in index of productivity	6.0 per cent.
Ratio of disallowance to EAGGF funds handled	0.4 per cent.
To maintain expenditure within vote provision, cash and running cost limited	—
New value for money savings in procurement of goods and services	6.0 per cent.
Yield: cost ratio of anti-fraud activities	3.0 : 1.0

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

School Inspections

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for North Thanet, (Mr. Gale) of 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1017* if she will publish the advice from Her Majesty's chief inspector on a more targeted approach in the second cycle of inspection. [39919]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 16 September that she had accepted in full the chief inspector's recommendations to move to a more targeted programme of inspection. The key elements of the new arrangements, which will take effect from the end of the first cycle, are that: each school will be subject to a full inspection within a six–year period, instead of every four years as at present: weaker schools should be inspected more frequently; seriously weak schools will be specifically identified within registered inspectors' reports; and that special visits will be made to schools which are models of good practice.

The Secretary of State has deposited copies of the chief inspector's recommendations and of her response in the Libraries of both Houses.

Teacher Training Courses

Mr Bunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the number and percentage of teachers who completed training courses in 1994, broken down by subject and in total; and who were in posts by March 1995. [39928]

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows the number of teachers who successfully completed Bachelor of Education or Postgraduate Certificate of Education courses leading to qualified teacher status in 1994 and their position as at 31 March 1995.

	Number of completers[1] in England and Wales Calendar year 1994	1994 completers in service at 31 March 1995 in the maintained schools sector in England and Wales[2]	In service as a percentage of completers
Primary	12,643	8,756	69
Secondary (by subject of ITT)			
Maths	1,598	974	61
English	1,389	1,023	74
Science	2,089	1,384	66
Modern foreign language	1,484	1,021	69
Technology	1,526	900	59
History	649	470	72
Geography	563	421	75
Art	730	398	55
Music	447	318	71
Religious education	344	232	67
Physical education	968	656	68
Other	1,123	662	59
Total secondary	12,910	8,459	66
Total primary and secondary	25,553	17,215	67

Notes:

[1] Excludes 131 students who successfully completed School Centred Initial Teacher Training in 1994.:

[2] Details of service as at 31/3/95 are provisional. Includes service in the maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special education sector. Service details are available for some, but not all, teachers in the independent and further and higher education sectors. Around 1,110—per cent.—of the 1994 completers are known to have entered service in these sectors, but are not included in the table.

Source:

Database of Teachers' Records.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what information from Office for Standards in Education inspections of providers under the nursery voucher scheme will be made available to parents; and when. [40389]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Ms Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many vouchers for nursery education have not been redeemed to date during phase 1 of the nursery voucher scheme. [40385]

Mr. Squire: Nursery education vouchers were issued in respect of 14,711 children for the summer term of 1996. Of these, 1,372—some 9 per cent.—have not been redeemed.

Ms Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the difference is between the number of vouchers issued under phase 1 of the nursery voucher scheme and the number of places available in each of the four pilot areas. [40383]

Mr. Squire: The number of vouchers issued for summer term 1996 in each of the phase 1 authorities is shown in the table. Information on the number of places available for children eligible for vouchers is not held centrally.

	Number of vouchers issued
Norfolk	8,976
Kensington and Chelsea	1,151
Wandsworth	3,170
Westminster	1,414

Ms Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many providers have participated to date in phase 1 of the nursery voucher scheme. [40390]

Mr. Squire: Some 1,141 providers, of which 647 are in the private and voluntary sectors, have participated in the scheme to date.

Ms. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the number of new providers established since the introduction of phase 1 of the nursery education voucher scheme. [40386]

Mr. Squire: Any provider that is not a maintained or independent school has to be registered under the Children Act 1989. Our records do not show whether an institution was established specifically in response to the introduction of the scheme.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will request each of the four local education authorities operating the vouchers scheme for pre-school education to publish an estimate of the number of places in all settings that will be required in each of their areas if 90 per cent. of eligible pupils' parents apply for vouchers. [40403]

Mr. Squire: The table shows the estimated number of eligible children in each of the phase 1 authorities and 90 per cent. thereof. These estimates of population are less reliable when broken down both by local authority area and by year group.

LEA	Estimated number of eligible children	90 per cent. of estimated number of eligible children
Norfolk	9,300	8,370
Kensington and Chelsea	1,650	1,485
Wandsworth	3,300	2,970
Westminster	1,900	1,710

Schools White Paper

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the pamphlet "Self-Government for Schools: A Summary" was accompanied with a letter noting that the White Paper is a consultation paper; and in what form responses to the consultation were invited. [40586]

Mr. Forth: A summary of the White Paper "Self-Government for Schools" was sent to the head teachers and chairmen of governors of all local education authority-maintained and grant-maintained schools. It was accompanied by a letter from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The letter invited comments on the White Paper by 4 October, gave details of where they should be sent, and noted that each school was eligible for one free copy of the White Paper on request.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many responses her Department has received to the consultation on the White Paper "Self-Government for Schools", listed by type of organisation consulted; which consultees responded favourably; which consultees offered criticisms; and what was the nature of these criticisms. [40588]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State received some 600 responses to the White Paper by the deadline of 4 October. We are currently analysing the responses. A summary will be placed in the Library in due course.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many copies of "Self-Government for Schools: A Summary" were sent out; to which bodies; and at what total cost. [40585]

Mr. Forth: The summary of the White Paper "Self-Government for Schools" was sent to the head teachers and chairmen of governors of all local education authorities-maintained and grant-maintained schools. It has also been made available to interested parties on request. Over 70,000 copies have so far been issued. The cost of producing and distributing the summaries sent to schools was some £18,000.

Students (Hardship Funds)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students applied for hardship funds in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96 for (i) further and (ii) higher education; and if she will make a statement. [40579]

Mr. Forth: The purpose of the hardship funds, correctly known as the access funds, is to provide financial help to students whose access to further or higher education might be inhibited by financial considerations or who, for whatever reason, including physical or other disabilities, face financial difficulties.

From the information provided by institutions, the number of eligible applicants for further and higher education access funds were as follows:

Academic year	*Further education*	*Higher education*
1993–94	41,668	77,060
1994–95	51,027	77,005
1995–96	n/a	n/a

n/a = not yet available.

Discretionary Awards

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what *(a)* statistics and *(b)* representations her Department has assessed regarding spending on (i) discretionary awards and (ii) special needs by local education authorities in England in 1995–96 and 1996–97; and if she will make a statement. [40545]

Mr. Forth: The latest available data from local education authorities on discretionary awards are for the academic year 1994–95. Provisional national data were published in a departmental press notice—110/96—on 1 April 1996. Final data, including information from individual local education authorities, will be published on 22 November in the statistics of education student support volume, 1994–95. Provisional data at national level for the academic year 1995–96 will be available in spring 1997.

Both the number and level of discretionary awards have been in decline recently. Representations have been made about this by a wide range of bodies representing the interests of students and institutions in dance and drama, horticulture and agriculture, legal practice and other disciplines. These are matters for local education authorities, who decide which students to support and at what rates in the light of local needs and priorities and the resources available.

Funds for special education are contained within the education standard spending assessment but cannot be separately identified. Local education authorities can and do spend more or less than their education SSA on education services.

Teaching Publicity

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the amount spent on publicity and promotion for each year since 1994, by the Teacher Training Agency (i) in total and (ii) broken down into components; how many calls are received annually by the telephone line promoting teaching as a career; and what evidence she has assessed to indicate that the telephone line has improved recruitment. [40587]

Mr. Forth: This is a matter for the Teacher Training Agency. I will ask the chairman of the agency, Geoffrey Parker, to write to the hon. Member direct.

Primary Schools

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average size of single teacher classes in primary schools in January in each local education authority and in total; and what was the actual and percentage change in numbers compared with January 1995 in each local education authority and in total.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information is shown in the table:

Average size of classes taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area in England 1995 and 1996 (provisional)

Position in January each year

LEA	Average class size 1995	Average class size [1]1996	Change[2] Number 1995–96	Change[2] Percentage 1995–96
Corporation of London	26.8	26.8	0.0	0.0
Camden	27.3	27.3	–0.1	–0.3
Greenwich	26.4	25.5	–0.9	–3.2
Hackney	26.1	26.1	0.0	–0.1
Hammersmith and Fulham	25.6	26.1	0.5	1.8
Islington	26.6	26.2	–0.3	–1.2
Kensington and Chelsea	25.1	24.4	–0.7	–2.8
Lambeth	24.6	24.6	0.0	–0.2
Lewisham	25.4	25.7	0.3	1.1
Southwark	26.9	26.1	–0.8	–2.9
Tower Hamlets	26.7	25.8	–0.9	–3.5
Wandsworth	25.2	25.4	0.2	0.9
Westminster	25.3	24.9	–0.4	–1.7
Barking and Dagenham	26.7	26.7	0.0	–0.1
Barnet	26.5	26.3	–0.2	–0.8
Bexley	28.6	28.6	0.0	0.1
Brent	26.9	26.7	–0.2	–0.7
Bromley	28.4	28.7	0.3	1.0
Croydon	28.1	28.3	0.2	0.8
Ealing	26.6	27.2	0.6	2.2
Enfield	28.4	28.5	0.1	0.5
Haringey	27.2	27.0	–0.2	–0.6
Harrow	27.1	27.8	0.7	2.8
Havering	27.4	27.9	0.5	2.0
Hillingdon	26.8	26.6	–0.2	–0.9
Hounslow	27.4	27.3	–0.1	–0.3
Kingston upon Thames	29.5	30.0	0.5	1.8
Merton	27.0	28.1	1.1	4.0
Newham	27.5	27.9	0.3	1.2
Redbridge	29.2	29.0	–0.2	–0.7
Richmond upon Thames	26.1	26.7	0.5	2.0
Sutton	28.0	27.3	–0.7	–2.4
Waltham Forest	26.5	26.4	–0.1	–0.3
Birmingham	28.2	27.8	–0.4	–1.5
Coventry	27.8	27.2	–0.6	–2.2
Dudley	27.3	26.9	–0.4	–1.5
Sandwell	28.2	28.6	0.4	1.4
Solihull	27.6	28.2	0.6	2.0
Walsall	26.0	26.0	–0.1	–0.4
Wolverhampton	26.2	26.5	0.3	1.1
Knowsley	28.0	27.6	–0.3	–1.2
Liverpool	27.1	26.8	–0.3	–1.1
St. Helens	27.0	27.5	0.5	1.7
Sefton	27.6	27.5	–0.1	–0.3
Wirral	26.1	26.4	0.3	1.1
Bolton	28.7	28.5	–0.2	–0.8
Bury	27.8	28.3	0.5	1.9
Manchester	26.9	27.0	0.1	0.5
Oldham	28.5	28.6	0.1	0.3
Rochdale	29.2	29.2	0.0	–0.1
Salford	27.3	27.4	0.1	0.5
Stockport	27.5	27.7	0.3	1.0
Tameside	29.5	29.3	–0.2	–0.5
Trafford	29.0	28.7	–0.3	–1.2
Wigan	28.0	28.2	0.2	0.6
Barnsley	27.5	28.2	0.7	2.7
Doncaster	28.1	28.2	0.1	0.5
Rotherham	25.8	26.9	1.1	4.4
Sheffield	26.8	26.8	0.0	–0.1
Bradford	27.8	27.9	0.1	0.4
Calderdale	27.5	27.7	0.2	0.7
Kirklees	28.2	28.7	0.4	1.5
Leeds	28.2	28.1	–0.1	–0.3
Wakefield	27.9	28.0	0.1	0.3
Gateshead	26.0	25.9	–0.1	–0.4
Newcastle upon Tyne	27.6	27.7	0.1	0.4
North Tyneside	26.9	27.0	0.2	0.6
South Tyneside	26.3	26.8	0.5	1.8
Sunderland	25.4	25.6	0.3	1.0
Isles of Scilly	17.3	13.7	–3.6	–20.8
Avon	27.8	27.7	–0.1	–0.5
Bedfordshire	26.8	27.1	0.3	1.1
Berkshire	27.0	27.3	0.3	1.2
Buckinghamshire	27.3	27.8	0.4	1.5
Cambridge	27.3	27.8	0.5	1.9
Cheshire	27.3	27.4	0.1	0.5
Cleveland	26.9	26.9	0.0	0.0
Cornwall	27.0	27.3	0.3	1.1
Cumbria	26.2	26.0	–0.2	–0.8
Derbyshire	27.9	28.9	1.0	3.7
Devon	26.7	27.2	0.5	1.8
Dorset	27.6	27.7	0.1	0.3
Durham	27.7	28.4	0.8	2.8
East Sussex	27.5	27.7	0.2	0.8
Essex	26.9	26.9	0.0	0.1
Gloucestershire	26.7	27.2	0.5	2.0
Hampshire	27.7	27.8	0.1	0.4
Hereford and Worcester	25.5	25.9	0.4	1.4
Hertfordshire	26.5	26.7	0.2	0.7
Humberside	27.7	27.9	0.2	0.7
Isle of Wight	26.3	26.9	0.6	2.4
Kent	27.7	27.7	0.0	0.1
Lancashire	27.9	28.4	0.6	2.0
Leicestershire	26.5	26.7	0.3	1.0
Lincolnshire	26.8	26.7	–0.1	–0.4
Norfolk	25.4	26.0	0.6	2.4
North Yorkshire	26.2	26.3	0.1	0.3
Northamptonshire	26.7	26.5	–0.1	–0.5
Northumberland	27.2	27.1	0.0	–0.1
Nottinghamshire	27.4	28.3	0.9	3.4
Oxfordshire	25.9	26.8	0.9	3.6
Shropshire	26.6	27.3	0.7	2.8
Somerset	27.0	27.3	0.3	1.2
Staffordshire	27.6	27.7	0.1	0.4
Suffolk	24.9	25.1	0.2	0.9
Surrey	25.6	25.8	0.2	0.7
Warwickshire	26.9	27.9	1.0	3.8
West Sussex	26.5	26.8	0.2	0.9
Wiltshire	26.9	27.1	0.3	0.9
England	27.1	27.3	0.2	0.7

[1] Provisional.

[2] Rounding of components may cause discrepancies in number and percentage changes. The comparable average class size in 1979 was 25.9.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage, and how many primary school pupils were in classes of over 30 in January in each local education authority and in total; and what was the actual and percentage change in numbers compared with January 1995 in each local education authority and in total. [40159]

Mr. Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 14 October 1996.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage and how many primary school pupils were in classes of over 36 in January in each local education authority and in total; and what was the actual and percentage change in numbers compared with January 1995 in each local education authority and in total. [40160]

Mr. Squire: The information requested is shown in the table.

Numbers and percentages of pupils in classes of size 37 or more taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area in England: 1995 and 1996 (provisional)

	1995		1996		Change	
	Pupils	Percentage[1]	Pupils	Percentage[2]	Number	Percentage[3]
Corporation of London	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Camden	0	0.0	37	0.4	37	[4]
Greenwich	50	0.3	0	0.0	-50	-100.0
Hackney	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Islington	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Kensington and Chelsea	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lambeth	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lewisham	84	0.5	0	0.0	-84	-100.0
Southwark	37	0.2	0	0.0	-37	-100.0
Tower Hamlets	50	0.3	37	0.3	-13	-26.0
Wandsworth	77	0.5	296	2.1	219	284.4
Westminster	39	0.6	0	0.0	-39	-100.0
Barking	323	2.1	272	1.8	-51	-15.8
Barnet	76	0.4	164	0.8	88	115.8
Bexley	37	0.2	112	0.5	75	202.7
Brent	346	1.8	170	0.9	-176	-50.9
Bromley	111	0.5	150	0.6	39	35.1
Croydon	38	0.2	78	0.3	40	105.3
Ealing	78	0.4	118	0.5	40	51.3
Enfield	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Haringey	39	0.2	0	0.0	-39	-100.0
Harrow	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Havering	37	0.2	127	0.6	90	243.2
Hillingdon	477	2.6	387	2.1	-90	-18.9
Hounslow	540	3.2	462	2.8	-78	-14.4
Kingston upon Thames	76	0.8	197	2.0	121	159.2
Merton	217	1.7	359	2.8	142	65.4
Newham	76	0.3	204	0.8	128	168.4
Redbridge	111	0.7	74	0.4	-37	-33.3
Richmond upon Thames	60	0.6	0	0.0	-60	-100.0
Sutton	78	0.6	115	0.9	37	47.4
Waltham Forest	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Birmingham	1,079	1.1	1,277	1.3	198	18.4
Coventry	571	2.1	386	1.4	-185	-32.4
Dudley	1,141	4.7	1,085	4.4	-56	-4.9
Sandwell	589	2.1	895	3.1	306	52.0
Solihull	341	1.8	339	1.8	-2	-0.6
Walsall	193	0.8	458	2.0	265	137.3
Wolverhampton	230	1.1	610	2.8	380	165.2
Knowsley	591	3.3	475	2.6	-116	-19.6
Liverpool	569	1.2	338	0.7	-231	-40.6
St Helens	687	4.7	807	5.5	120	17.5
Sefton	262	1.0	417	1.7	155	59.2
Wirral	339	1.2	338	1.2	-1	-0.3
Bolton	1,420	6.3	1,751	7.4	331	23.3
Bury	261	1.7	267	1.7	6	2.3
Manchester	789	1.9	1,539	3.6	750	95.1
Oldham	574	2.7	598	2.8	24	4.2
Rochdale	272	1.4	233	1.2	-39	-14.3
Salford	595	2.6	887	3.9	292	49.1
Stockport	608	2.5	878	3.5	270	44.4
Tameside	306	1.4	452	2.1	146	47.7
Trafford	946	5.0	419	2.2	-527	-55.7
Wigan	1,138	4.3	1,377	5.3	239	21.0
Barnsley	504	2.5	499	2.4	-5	-1.0
Doncaster	1,358	5.2	1,163	4.3	-195	-14.4
Rotherham	200	0.9	314	1.4	114	57.0
Sheffield	1,328	3.4	1,389	3.5	61	4.6
Bradford	883	2.7	1,309	3.9	426	48.2
Calderdale	0	0.0	197	1.1	197	[4]

Numbers and percentages of pupils in classes of size 37 or more taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area in England: 1995 and 1996 (provisional)

	1995		1996		Change	
	Pupils	Percentage[1]	Pupils	Percentage[2]	Number	Percentage[3]
Kirklees	1,140	3.5	1,489	4.6	349	30.6
Leeds	2,190	3.6	2,354	3.9	164	7.5
Wakefield	1,440	5.2	1,206	4.3	–234	–16.3
Gateshead	117	0.7	80	0.5	–37	–31.6
Newcastle upon Tyne	710	3.5	623	3.0	–87	–12.3
North Tyneside	283	1.9	395	2.6	112	39.6
South Tyneside	562	3.8	484	3.3	–78	–13.9
Sunderland	155	0.6	113	0.4	–42	–27.1
Isles of Scilly	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Avon	613	0.8	867	1.1	254	41.4
Bedfordshire	1,824	4.7	2,094	5.4	270	14.8
Berkshire	625	1.1	622	1.0	–3	–0.5
Buckinghamshire	2,247	3.8	2,404	4.0	157	7.0
Cambridgeshire	375	0.7	414	0.7	39	10.4
Cheshire	1,717	2.0	2,035	2.4	318	18.5
Cleveland	2,131	3.6	2,126	3.6	–5	–0.2
Cornwall	766	1.9	533	1.3	–233	–30.4
Cumbria	682	1.7	756	1.9	74	10.9
Derybshire	3,116	4.0	7,176	9.1	4,060	130.3
Devon	879	1.1	1,412	1.8	533	60.6
Dorset	188	0.4	388	0.9	200	106.4
Durham	844	1.6	1,123	2.2	279	33.1
East Sussex	74	0.2	336	0.7	262	354.1
Essex	417	0.3	372	0.3	–45	–10.8
Gloucestershire	155	0.4	306	0.7	151	97.4
Hampshire	1,257	1.0	1,416	1.1	159	12.6
Hereford and Worcester	306	0.6	598	1.2	292	95.4
Hertfordshire	194	0.2	225	0.3	31	16.0
Humberside	3,272	4.1	3,114	3.9	–158	–4.8
Isle of Wight	39	0.6	115	1.6	76	194.9
Kent	359	0.3	508	0.4	149	41.5
Lancashire	2,834	2.3	3,922	3.2	1,088	38.4
Leicestershire	1,117	1.5	1,826	2.4	709	63.5
Lincolnshire	497	1.0	572	1.1	75	15.1
Norfolk	93	0.2	348	0.6	255	274.2
North Yorkshire	1,108	2.0	932	1.6	–176	–15.9
Northamptonshire	188	0.4	504	1.0	316	168.1
Northumberland	662	3.4	581	3.0	–81	–12.2
Nottinghamshire	2,973	3.6	3,257	3.9	284	9.6
Oxfordshire	410	1.0	775	1.9	365	89.0
Shropshire	416	1.2	516	1.5	100	24.0
Somerset	204	0.6	341	0.9	137	67.2
Staffordshire	3,282	3.7	3,623	4.0	341	10.4
Suffolk	74	0.2	76	0.2	2	2.7
Surrey	592	0.9	360	0.5	–232	–39.2
Warwickshire	678	1.6	658	1.5	–20	–2.9
West Sussex	336	0.6	153	0.3	–183	–54.5
Wiltshire	336	0.7	377	0.8	41	12.2
England	65,308	1.7	78,561	2.0	13,253	20.3

[1] Provisional.
[2] Number of pupils in single teacher classes of size 37 or more expressed a percentage of all pupils in single teacher classes.
[3] Change in the number of pupils in single teacher classes of 37 or more between 1995 and 1996 expressed as a percentage of pupils in single teacher classes of 37 or more in 1995.
[4] No pupils in single teacher classes of 37 or more taught by one teacher in 1995.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage and how many primary school pupils were in classes of over 40 in January in each local education authority and in total; and what was the actual and percentage change in numbers compared with January 1995 in each local education authority and in total. [40161]

Mr. Squire: The information requested is shown in the table:

Numbers and percentages of pupils in classes of size 41 or more taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area in England: 1995 and 1996 (provisional)

Position in January in each year

	1995		1996		Change	
	Pupils	Percentage[1]	Pupils	Percentage[2]	Number	Percentage[3]
Corporation of London	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Camden	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Greenwich	50	0.3	0	0.0	–50	–100.0
Hackney	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Islington	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Kensington and Chelsea	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lambeth	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lewisham	47	0.3	0	0.0	–47	–100.0
Southwark	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tower Hamlets	50	0.3	0	0.0	–50	–100.0
Wandsworth	0	0.0	62	0.4	62	[4]—
Westminster	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Barking	52	0.3	0	0.0	–52	–100.0
Barnet	0	0.0	48	0.2	48	[4]—
Bexley	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Brent	188	1.0	95	0.5	–93	–49.5
Bromley	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Croydon	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Ealing	0	0.0	44	0.2	44	[4]—
Enfield	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Haringey	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Harrow	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Havering	0	0.0	50	0.3	50	[4]—
Hillingdon	86	0.5	41	0.2	–45	–52.3
Hounslow	41	0.2	41	0.2	0	0.0
Kingston upon Thames	0	0.0	47	0.5	47	[4]—
Merton	138	1.1	51	0.4	–87	–63.0
Newham	0	0.0	52	0.2	52	[4]—
Redbridge	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Richmond upon Thames	60	0.6	0	0.0	–60	–100.0
Sutton	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Waltham Forest	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Birmingham	107	0.1	157	0.2	50	46.7
Coventry	75	0.3	0	0.0	–75	–100.0
Dudley	867	3.6	775	3.2	–92	–10.6
Sandwell	42	0.2	83	0.3	41	97.6
Solihull	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Walsall	42	0.2	45	0.2	3	7.1
Wolverhampton	0	0.0	233	1.1	233	[4]—
Knowsley	52	0.3	52	0.3	0	0.0
Liverpool	230	0.5	0	0.0	–230	–100.0
St. Helens	0	0.0	83	0.6	83	[4]—
Sefton	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Wirral	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Bolton	194	0.9	535	2.3	341	175.8
Bury	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Manchester	177	0.4	582	1.4	405	228.8
Oldham	188	0.9	178	0.8	–10	–5.3
Rochdale	87	0.4	41	0.2	–46	–52.9
Salford	94	0.4	314	1.4	220	234.0
Stockport	47	0.2	117	0.5	70	148.9
Tameside	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Trafford	41	0.2	0	0.0	–41	–100.0
Wigan	87	0.3	127	0.5	40	46.0
Barnsley	193	1.0	152	0.7	–41	–21.2
Doncaster	41	0.2	0	0.0	–41	–100.0
Rotherham	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sheffield	244	0.6	229	0.6	–15	–6.1
Bradford	0	0.0	43	0.1	43	[4]—
Calderdale	0	0.0	45	0.2	45	[4]—
Kirklees	91	0.3	139	0.4	48	52.7
Leeds	266	0.4	244	0.4	–22	–8.3
Wakefield	54	0.2	52	0.2	–2	–3.7
Gateshead	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	134	0.7	49	0.2	–85	–63.4

Numbers and percentages of pupils in classes of size 41 or more taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area in England: 1995 and 1996 (provisional)

Position in January in each year

	1995		1996		Change	
	Pupils	*Percentage*[1]	*Pupils*	*Percentage*[2]	*Number*	*Percentage*[3]
North Tyneside	50	0.3	50	0.3	0	0.0
South Tyneside	103	0.7	99	0.7	–4	–3.9
Sunderland	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Isles of Scilly	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Avon	92	0.1	44	0.1	–48	–52.2
Bedfordshire	509	1.3	482	1.2	–27	–5.3
Berkshire	85	0.1	46	0.1	–39	–45.9
Buckinghamshire	419	0.7	372	0.6	–47	–11.2
Cambridgeshire	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cheshire	213	0.2	142	0.2	–71	–33.3
Cleveland	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cornwall	87	0.2	41	0.1	–46	–52.9
Cumbria	110	0.3	111	0.3	1	0.9
Derbyshire	474	0.6	722	0.9	248	52.3
Devon	45	0.1	128	0.2	83	184.4
Dorset	0	0.0	86	0.2	86	[4]—
Durham	0	0.0	167	0.3	167	[4]—
East Sussex	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Essex	230	0.2	109	0.1	–121	–52.6
Gloucestershire	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hampshire	46	0.0	47	0.0	1	2.2
Hereford and Worcester	41	0.1	150	0.3	109	265.9
Hertfordshire	42	0.1	0	0.0	–42	–100.0
Humberside	391	0.5	229	0.3	–162	–41.4
Isle of Wight	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Kent	285	0.2	89	0.1	–196	–68.8
Lancashire	244	0.2	41	0.0	–203	–83.2
Leicestershire	424	0.6	224	0.3	–200	–47.2
Lincolnshire	82	0.2	42	0.1	–40	–48.8
Norfolk	55	0.1	43	0.1	–12	–21.8
North Yorkshire	50	0.1	140	0.2	90	180.0
Northamptonshire	0	0.0	42	0.1	42	[4]—
Northumberland	41	0.2	0	0.0	–41	–100.0
Nottinghamshire	543	0.7	212	0.3	–331	–61.0
Oxfordshire	98	0.3	0	0.0	–98	–100.0
Shropshire	0	0.0	102	0.3	102	[4]—
Somerset	53	0.1	41	0.1	–12	–22.6
Staffordshire	657	0.7	539	0.6	–118	–18.0
Suffolk	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Surrey	89	0.1	45	0.1	–44	–49.4
Warwickshire	175	0.4	44	0.1	–131	–74.9
West Sussex	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Wiltshire	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
England	9,798	0.3	9,435	0.2	–363	–3.7

[1] Provisional.
[2] Pupils in single teacher classes of 41 or more expressed as a percentage of all pupils in single teacher classes.
[3] Change in the number of pupils in single teacher classes of 41 or more between 1995 and 1996 expressed as a percentage of pupils in single teacher classes of 41 or more in 1995.
[4] No pupils in single teacher classes of 41 or more taught by one teacher in 1995.

Student Grants

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to end the administration of student grants by local education authorities. [40558]

Mr. Forth: The Government have no plans at present to alter the current arrangements. The national committee of inquiry into higher education has been asked to look into the longer-term funding of higher education, including student support. The committee will report in the summer of 1997.

Grant for Education Support and Training

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the GEST funding per pupil in *(a)* grant-maintained schools and *(b)* local education authority schools, in each local education authority for (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96 and (iii) 1996–97; and if she will make a statement. [40593]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* The table shows GEST funding per pupil in local authority-maintained schools for 1995–96 and 1996–97 based on the latest available figures. Variations reflect such factors as the impact of bidding and the incidence of

small schools. Figures for 1994–95 are not readily available. Grant-maintained schools are outside the scope of GEST, but are funded for similar activities through special purpose (development) grant. SPG (D) grant is paid direct to GM schools at the rate of £42.50 per pupil in 1995–96 and £44.50 in 1996–97. GEST and SPG(D) are not directly comparable because the responsibilities of LEA and GM schools differ.

GEST funding per pupil

LEA	*Funding per pupil 1995-96* £	*Funding per pupil 1996-97* £
Corporation of London	231.60	258.49
Camden	59.09	50.07
Greenwich	41.64	42.36
Hackney	47.79	54.14
Hammersmith and Fulham	44.54	58.18
Islington	48.64	57.93
Kensington and Chelsea	45.47	63.37
Lambeth	52.18	68.49
Lewisham	44.06	52.66
Southwark	53.29	50.78
Tower Hamlets	51.75	56.50
Wandsworth	59.13	66.44
Westminster	40.27	47.48
Barking	39.19	40.96
Barnet	41.99	32.20
Bexley	33.06	37.13
Brent	72.42	73.16
Bromley	35.49	37.35
Croydon	36.24	37.06
Ealing	45.38	36.33
Enfield	40.08	42.02
Haringey	44.79	47.97
Harrow	38.62	33.74
Havering	35.01	32.11
Hillingdon	43.14	38.84
Hounslow	35.54	36.21
Kingston upon Thames	34.80	28.64
Merton	44.74	46.13
Newham	46.39	41.75
Redbridge	32.68	30.83
Richmond upon Thames	33.84	35.92
Sutton	51.53	52.62
Waltham Forest	38.58	47.84
Birmingham	35.91	34.81
Coventry	42.23	44.79
Dudley	40.45	40.09
Sandwell	34.42	43.23
Solihull	32.98	31.42
Walsall	41.87	42.88
Wolverhampton	43.50	44.94
Knowsley	41.25	46.49
Liverpool	39.39	41.76
St. Helens	34.56	35.20
Sefton	38.53	28.67
Wirral	30.57	35.56
Bolton	30.46	35.66
Bury	33.18	35.56
Manchester	40.38	41.31
Oldham	37.78	39.58
Rochdale	34.80	37.54
Salford	31.96	36.44
Stockport	39.42	36.07
Tameside	34.89	38.01
Trafford	33.89	37.12
Wigan	33.74	40.31
Barnsley	38.39	43.37
Doncaster	39.60	33.99
Rotherham	38.87	37.70
Sheffield	36.36	36.92
Bradford	42.83	45.92
Calderdale	36.10	44.62
Kirlees	40.82	43.20
Leeds	37.89	35.49
Wakefield	35.18	35.94
Gateshead	40.52	39.44
Newcastle upon Tyne	48.85	48.84
North Tyneside	39.44	43.91
South Tyneside	42.13	38.37
Sunderland	23.98	32.64
Isle of Scilly	273.50	293.64
Bath and North–east Somerset	n/a	30.99
City of Bristol	n/a	37.74
North–west Somerset	n/a	32.26
South Gloucestershire	n/a	34.54
Hartlepool	n/a	35.24
Middlesbrough	n/a	32.57
Redcar and Cleveland	n/a	34.51
Stockton on Tees	n/a	31.26
City of Kingston upon Hull	n/a	30.53
East Riding of Yorkshire	n/a	38.07
North east Lincolnshire	n/a	33.89
North Lincolnshire	n/a	38.98
North Yorkshire	37.12	40.71
York	n/a	49.21
Avon	31.26	n/a
Bedfordshire	32.36	36.39
Berkshire	37.24	36.55
Buckinghamshire	40.96	38.90
Cambridgeshire	43.69	39.87
Cheshire	36.25	34.78
Cleveland	29.62	n/a
Cornwall	38.96	36.76
Cumbria	46.14	44.35
Derbyshire	39.93	41.30
Devon	34.57	39.80
Dorset	35.06	35.17
Durham	34.63	38.28
East Sussex	36.53	34.92
Essex	41.59	43.22
Glouchestershire	45.73	49.45
Hampshire	34.25	35.15
Hereford and Worcester	36.19	35.67
Hertfordshire	41.39	41.66
Humberside	32.39	n/a
Isle of Wight	58.56	52.85
Kent	39.88	42.10
Lancashire	36.98	37.04
Leicestershire	29.57	30.50
Lincolnshire	39.58	42.80
Norfolk	39.63	42.16
Northamptonshire	37.67	38.50
Northumberland	37.15	40.50
Nottinghamshire	33.63	34.13
Oxfordshire	40.48	40.81
Shropshire	39.61	41.55
Somerset	37.26	38.57
Staffordshire	32.07	34.23
Suffolk	36.75	38.06
Surrey	35.67	35.51
Warwickshire	33.76	34.96
West Sussex	35.22	34.61
Wiltshire	41.46	44.39
England	37.76	39.02

n/a = not applicable due to local government reorganisation.

HEALTH

Suicide Attempts

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many suicide attempts have been made at the Broadoak psychiatric unit, Broadgreen hospital during the past two years; and if he will make a statement. [40301]

Mr. Burns: The available information is as follows:

September 1994 to August 1995: two unexpected deaths; one open verdict, one still awaited;

September 1995 to August 1996: two unexpected deaths; inquest verdicts awaited.

Figures relating to suicide attempts are not available centrally.

Health Information Service

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many calls the health information service has received in each year since 1992; and how much funding it has received in each year. [40565]

Mr. Horam: The health information service was established in April 1992. Table A provides details of the number of calls received by the service since its establishment and table B provides information on the cost of providing the service for the financial years 1992–93 to 1996–97.

Table A: Number of calls received by the health information service between April 1992 and September 1996

Year	*Number of calls*
1992	51,252
1993	136,293
1994	275,404
1995	457,187
1996 (January–September)	442,424

Table B: Cost of providing the service between 1992–93 and 1996–97

Financial year	*Cost £*
1992–93	1,507,643
1993–94	1,881,998
1994–95	2,045,338
1995–96	2,337,766
1996–97[1]	2,718,933

[1] Projected expenditure for 1996–97.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures are followed in respect of monitoring the subjects of inquiry or complaint to the health information service. [40566]

Mr. Horam: Health authorities have responsibility for securing the provision of the freephone health information service in line with health service guidance HSG(95)44, copies of which are available in the Library.

Arrangements for monitoring calls made to the health information service are for determination between individual health authorities and their health information service providers. However, any system of monitoring must respect the callers right to confidentiality.

New Hospitals

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new hospitals have been built in 1996 and in each of the previous five years in *(a)* London and *(b)* each health region. [40569]

Mr. Horam: This information is not collected centrally.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accident and emergency departments have been closed in each health region in 1996 and in each of the previous five years. [40570]

Mr. Horam: It is the responsibility of each health authority to ensure the provision of adequate accident and emergency services for its resident population. Trusts with an accident and emergency department are listed in table 9 of "Bed availability for England". Booklets for 1993–94 and 1994–95 are available in the Library. The 1995–96 figures are expected to be available in November.

Care should be taken in interpreting any reduction in the number of trusts with accident and emergency departments as closures. A trust may have more than one A and E department but will be listed once only. Mergers of trusts each with an A and E department would be listed once following a merger.

Community Health Councils

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the procedure for the termination of appointments to membership of community health councils. [40526]

Mr. Horam: The conditions for termination of community health council membership are laid down in statute which came into force on 1 April 1996 There are no plans to review them.

Mixed Wards

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mixed wards were in existence in the most recent year for which figures are available. [40571]

Mr. Horam: This information is not collected centrally.

Indebtedness

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* health trusts in respect of problems arising from indebtedness; and what extra assistance he is offering in this respect. [40561]

Mr. Horam: Health authorities have no power to borrow and thus the issue of their indebtedness does not arise. National health service trusts have powers to borrow to finance capital expenditure. Such borrowing is controlled by the external financing limit—EFL—which they are not permitted to exceed. Reporting of changes in trusts' balance sheet financing and indebtedness and

performance against the EFL form part of the year-end requirement to produce audited accounts, which are published.

Hepatitis

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place a copy of NHS executive letter EL (96) 77 in the Library. [40675]

Mr. Horam: Copies have been placed in the Library.

Hospital Bed Closures

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the number of *(a)* acute bed closures and *(b)* long-stay bed closures in London in each year since the publication of the Tomlinson report. [40567]

Mr. Malone: Information on the number of beds opened or closed is not collected centrally.

Data on the average daily number of beds available in acute hospital wards in London, for the last three years for which information is available, are set out in the table. Similar information on long-stay beds is not collected centrally.

Average daily number of available acute beds

	Inner London	*Outer London*	*Total*
1992–93	10,335	8,881	19,216
1993–94	9,708	8,499	18,207
1994–95	9,622	7,977	17,600

Inner London includes former London postgraduates special health authorities. Totals may not add due to rounding.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals have closed in 1996 and in each of the previous five years in *(a)* London and *(b)* each health region. [40568]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 7 June, *Official Report*, column *585*.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 16 October 1996

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Staff Costs

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council what discussions he has had with the Senior Salaries Review Body to encourage the SSRB to complete its work in respect of separating the staffing costs of hon. Members out of the office cost allowance; and if he will make a statement on when proposals will be received and put to the House. [40266]

Mr. Newton: Work on the SSRB's development recommendations has already begun at official level. Sir Michael Perry and I are to meet shortly to consider how best to carry this work forward, bearing in mind the SSRB's other responsibilities.

Asbestos

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee on what occasions asbestos has been encountered during building and refurbishment on the parliamentary estate during the last year. [40298]

Sir Raymond Powell: As with most older buildings, asbestos is regularly encountered during building and refurbishment work on the parliamentary estate. Generally, the Parliamentary Works Directorate is aware of the locations where asbestos will be found, which are recorded in its asbestos register. Where asbestos materials can safely remain in place, they are encapsulated and inspected at regular intervals. Ultimately, the aim is to remove any materials containing asbestos but that cannot all be done at once, nor is it necessary to do so. Maintenance and new works projects include specific allowance for the removal of hazardous materials. In all such projects the opportunity is taken to remove asbestos and materials containing asbestos in the course of the work. The removal of asbestos is undertaken in strict accordance with the guidelines and procedures laid down by the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee (1) if all asbestos has now been removed from the Palace of Westminster; [41092]

(2) what types of asbestos were present in the Palace of Westminster; what were the levels of asbestos found in the air; and when the asbestos was removed; [41094]

(3) what are the current levels of asbestos remaining in the Palace of Westminster. [41093]

Sir Raymond Powell: As in most older buildings, there is some asbestos remaining in the Palace of Westminster. A register is kept of the locations on the Parliamentary Estate where asbestos is known to remain—usually because it is inaccessible—and of those places from which it has been removed. It is the practice to remove asbestos found when undertaking maintenance and other works services. Ultimately, the aim is to remove any materials containing asbestos but that cannot all be done at once, nor is it necessary to do so. Remaining asbestos is sealed in and inspected at regular intervals.

Removal of asbestos is undertaken in line with the recommendations of the Health and Safety Executive for managing the asbestos hazard and preventing any risks to occupants or workmen. Areas are tested for fibres in the air both during and after the removal of asbestos. All areas have to be issued with an asbestos clear certificate by an independent accredited company before they are reoccupied.

Parliament Square

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what discussions he has had with Westminster council regarding the proposed closure of the south side of Parliament square to traffic. [40944]

Sir Raymond Powell: The Director of Parliamentary Works is a member of a consultation group on the scheme for Parliament square and he reports to my Committee. I will ask him to write to the hon. Member.

Fact-finding Missions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council what facilities exist for hon. Members who are Front Benchers to visit countries on fact-finding missions and for such visits to be paid for by *(a)* Her Majesty's Government and *(b)* the House; and if he will examine the desirability of making additional funds available for this purpose. [40242]

Mr. Newton: Her Majesty's Government facilities are a matter for individual Departments concerned. With regard to facilities provided by the House, the sum of £108,657 is allocated within the 1996–97 Short money—financial assistance to Opposition parties—in connection with Front-Bench travel in the United Kingdom and Europe on the parliamentary business of the parties. This travel fund, which I announced on 4 November 1993, *Official Report*, column *495*, is uprated on the same basis as the main Short money allocation, that is by reference to the retail prices index in April of each year.

PRIME MINISTER

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his statement of 10 October in Bournemouth concerning improvements to rail passenger services from privatisation, if he will *(a)* give specific examples and *(b)* show that criteria he used for coming to this general conclusion. [40796]

The Prime Minister: Rail franchising is leading to extra investment, additional train services, better passengers charters and improved passenger care. The new franchisee on South Eastern, for instance, is committed to replacing its existing trains with modern

rolling stock, at a cost of up to £400 million. The franchisee for Midland MainLine plans to introduce an extra 22 weekday services each day between Leicester and London, and InterCity East Coast intends to invest some £17 million in improvements to rolling stock performance, passenger security and disabled access. These are just some of the improvements which franchising will bring to the passenger rail network at less cost to the taxpayer.

Royal Travel Expenditure

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Prime Minister what plans the Government have for the future funding of royal travel by rail and air. [41216]

The Prime Minister: The Government propose, with Her Majesty the Queen's agreement and following consultation with the Leader of the Opposition to invite Parliament to approve next year a single grant in aid on the Department of Transport's vote for official royal travel by rail and air. The royal household will use this to purchase the services of the royal train, of No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron or suitable commercial providers.

At present, these costs are met by the Department of Transport and the Ministry of Defence or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as part of their general expenditure. The aim of the change is to have one focus—the royal household—responsible for securing the best value for money from this public money and to improve accountability to Parliament through the Department of Transport.

The grant in aid from the Department of National Heritage, under which the royal household takes on first line of responsibility for property services on the occupied royal palaces, provides a suitable model. It has enabled savings in excess of 25 per cent. in real terms to be achieved since it was introduced in 1991. An annual report on the new grant in aid for royal travel will be presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Transport. Once the new system is established, targets for savings will be agreed and performance against them published in this annual report.

The new grant in aid will not cover expenditure on the royal yacht, which is due to be decommissioned in 1997.

I am confident that these measures, which are consistent with modern financial management, will improve the cost-efficiency and public accountability of this expenditure.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Promotional Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much his Department has spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotions, and *(c)* hospitality in each of the last six years. [40618]

Mr. Streeter: My Department has spent the following amounts on *(a)* and *(b)* publicity and promotions, and *(c)* hospitality over the last six years:

1991–92: Publicity and promotions £35,734
Hospitality £20,895
1992–93: Publicity and promotions £40,000
Hospitality £20,697
1993–94: Publicity and promotions £46,667
Hospitality £20,477
1994–95: Publicity and promotions £78,961
Hospitality £26,159
1995–96: Publicity and promotions £117,684
Hospitality £27,694
1996–97 (to end September):
Publicity and promotions £40,061
Hospitality £6,165.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by his Department in each of the past two years. [40636]

Mr. Streeter: The information requested is not collected in relation to either oral or written questions and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Royal Commission Recommendations

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action has been taken on the royal commission on criminal justice recommendation No. 249 on monitoring of performance during training and No. 251 on performance appraisal of the judiciary. [41220]

Mr. Streeter: The royal commission on criminal justice recommended that

> "The performance of judges should be monitored during training by other members of the judiciary"
>
> (Recommendation 249)

The performance of those who sit in a part-time judicial capacity, both in the Crown court and in other jurisdictions, is already appraised, particularly during their initial training. Following consultation with the senior judiciary and the chairman of the Judicial Studies Board, these arrangements will be extended further.

At the present time, before a trainee assistant recorder, for example, is authorised to sit alone, he or she must undertake an induction programme, which includes the training course run by the Judicial Studies Board, but also involves a period of sitting in with an experienced circuit judge in the Crown court—the pupil-master judge—who is required to report to the Lord Chancellor stating whether in his or her opinion the trainee is duly fitted to sit.

In accordance with the recommendation of the Judicial Studies Board, the role of the pupil-master judge in respect of assistant recorders—and the equivalent supervising judges in respect of certain other categories of judicial office holder—is to be extended to include an element of in-court observation so as to provide further advice and appraisal to newly-appointed part-time judges, and enable better assessment of their suitability for appointment to full-time judicial office.

Advice is already provided to those who attend Judicial Studies Board courses by serving members of the judiciary who serve as tutors for this purpose.

Full-time judges are appointed only from the ranks of those with the experience of service in a part-time capacity for a sufficient period to demonstrate their competence and suitability for full-time appointment; the period of part-time service accordingly provides a basis for on-going assessment for this purpose.

The royal commission also recommended that

"The judiciary should also have in place a formal system of performance appraisal. Presiding and Resident Judges should have the lead in this; members of the Bar should also be able to comment on the performance of judges. These aspects should be looked at by the Lord Chancellor in consultation with the judiciary." (Recommendation 251).

These matters have been reviewed, as recommended by the royal commission.

There are already appraisal arrangements in place for the judiciary. It is an essential feature of the arrangements for part–time sittings by recorders and assistant recorders and others that their service affords opportunities for assessing their suitability for appointment to full–time judicial office—and this stands to be developed further in accordance with the arrangements outlined above.

Judicial office holders are also assessed by more senior full–time judges as to their suitability for appointment to higher judicial office.

Judges accept their obligations under the judicial oath which is taken on appointment. All judges are subject to two further forms of appraisal or review. First, almost all judicial decisions are subject to appeal or review, enabling higher courts to scrutinise and, where appropriate, to comment on or redress judicial decisions or conduct. Secondly, judges undertake their work for the most part in full view of the public and are subject to the more informal scrutiny of the media.

It is, however, important to ensure that we do not undermine the primary place within our constitution of the principle of judicial independence or our confidence that judges will determine each case fairly and on its own merits, without fear of reprisal or improper intervention. The independence of the judiciary, therefore, must connote independence not only from the executive but that of one judge from another. For these reasons, neither the Lord Chancellor nor any other senior judges have any constitutional power to require one judge to report on another, or to offer appraisal or any other qualitative assessment of the judge's performance as a judge. Neither is there any authority to require a judge to submit to such appraisal. The Lord Chancellor's statutory powers to dismiss a judge, which in any event do not extend to the more senior judges, are also very narrowly drawn. These important considerations make it inappropriate to introduce a formal system of appraisal. The heads of divisions, and presiding and resident judges, however, do have responsibilities for the oversight of judicial business and they are able to assist judges informally where that appears likely to be helpful. It is a well understood role of the leaders of the circuits to draw to the attention of the presiding and resident judges, as appropriate, concerns expressed by members of the Bar about the judiciary.

In his report "Access to Justice", Lord Woolf recommended that *the judiciary conducting civil cases should be monitored int he performance of the case management functions envisaged for them int he report.* This monitoring would not amount to appraisal, but would be aimed at securing consistency of approach in this new role and promotion of best practice. The Government support that recommendation, and its aim of facilitating the improvement of judges' working methods.

Judges are fully aware of their duties and responsibilities to the Crown, and the existing arrangements strike an appropriate balance between the obligations of the judiciary to the public and the overriding of preserving judicial independence.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by his Department in each of the past two years. [40629]

Mr. Willetts: This is a matter of public record.

HMSO (Uzbekistan)

Sir Michael Shersby: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what percentage of the value of the consignments of educational stationery sent by Her Majesty's Stationery Office to Uzbekistan has so far been recovered; how long it will take on the basis of current sales to recover the remaining payments due to the office; and what steps he has taken to ensure that there will be no loss resulting from this business; [40452]

(2) if he will publish details of the current situation and projection for Her Majesty's Stationery Office's stationery trade with Uzbekistan; and what estimate he has made of how much of the money owing to the office he expects to recoup. [40451]

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* The original sales value of the 10 consignments for Uzbekistan was £6.5 million. Prior to privatisation on 30 September, HMSO had received £1.6 million from its trading with Uzbekistan, £1.5 million of which was reported to the Committee on Public Accounts by the then chief executive of HMSO on 10 June 1996. This fully covers the sales value of the first three consignments and amounts to nearly 25 per cent. of the sales value of all 10 consignments.

HMSO signed, in early June, a new contract with Uztoshkitob—the Uzbekistan Republic Wholesale and Retail Association of the State Publishing Committee—aimed at maximising potential receipts from the sale in Uztoshkitob's retail outlets of the remaining goods. Payment is dependent on the rate at which the goods are sold.

The return due from retail sales during August and September amounted to approximately £200,000, but conversion to hard currency is precluded by general bank order. All bidders for HMSO were made aware of the details of HMSO's trading with Uzbekistan: the payments so far received, stocks in the UK and abroad, the contract terms and potential receipts. The successful bidder took over the stationery office as a going concern including all the stocks and debtors of the business.

The HMSO privatisation was in the form of a share sale rather than an asset sale and therefore it is not possible to identify the value placed by the new owner on the Uzbekistan stocks, contract and potential receipts. The sale of HMSO represents value for money for the taxpayer taking account of all assets and liabilities involved. Realisation of future payments from Uztoshkitob is now a matter for the Stationery Office Ltd.

Political Advisers

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many political advisers have been employed in each Government Department in each of the last three years; at what costs; and what are the current salary scales by which they are paid. [40448]

Mr. Freeman: The information is contained in the tables.

Special advisers are paid on a salary spine of 34 points ranging from £20,631 to £71,597.

Special advisers in post in Government Departments

	1 August 1993	*1 August 1994*	*1 August 1995*
No. 10 Downing Street	4.6	4.6	5.6
Deputy Prime Minister's Office	0	0	2
No. 12 Downing Street	1	1	1
Chief Whip's Office (Lord's)	1	1	1
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	1	1	2
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's Office	1.3	1	0
Defence, Ministry of,	1	1	1
Education and Employment, Department for,	2	2	1
Environment, Department of the,	4	4	4
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	2	2	2
Her Majesty's Treasury	3	3	3
Health, Department of,	1	1	2
Home Office	2	2	2
National Heritage, Department of,	1	0	1
Northern Ireland Office	1	1	1
Privy Council Office	1	1	1
Scottish Office	2	2	2
Social Security, Department of,	1	1	1
Trade and Industry, Department of,	0	4	1
Transport, Department of,	0	1	1
Welsh Office	0	1	1
Total	29.9	34.6	35.6

Figures include paid political and expert special advisers.

Total salary costs for Special Advisers

1 August 1993 –31 July 1994	*1 August 1994 –31 July 1995*	*1 August 1995 –31 July 1996*
£1,133,590	£1,460,733	£1,512,622

Total salary costs take account of any changes in postholders and additional appointments during the year.

New Buildings and Premises

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by his Department and its agencies; and if he will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41153]

Mr. Willetts: The table details for the Cabinet Office and its agencies, including the Central Office of Information, (i) the capital costs, including fees, of new buildings and premises and new extensions to existing buildings and premises and (ii) the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented for the five financial years 1991–92; 1992–93; 1993–94; 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Financial year	*Capital costs*	*Square footage (purchased)*	*Square footage (rented)*
1991–92	Nil	Nil	Nil
1992–93	£685,000	1,613	Nil
1993–94	Nil	Nil	15,954
1994–95	£2,940,482	Not offices	86,638
1995–96	Nil	Nil	30,083

The capital costs include extensions to non office accommodation at the Civil Service College and other non-office accommodation occupied by various agencies. Corresponding information for the Stationery Office Ltd. is not available from the company.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Millennium Exhibition

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the arrangement by which the chief executive of the Welsh Development Agency has been appointed chief executive of Greenwich Millennium Exhibition plc with an option to return to the Welsh Development Agency within 90 days; what assessment she has made of the principal advantages of this arrangement to the exhibition company; and if she will make a statement. [41068]

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will state in respect of the millennium exhibition planned for the Greenwich peninsula site *(a)* the amount to be contributed by the national lottery, *(b)* private commitments already made by each individual organisation and the total and *(c)* the number of staff, their location, and names of those responsible as executive officers. [40930]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to the hon. Members in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Royal Naval College

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what the responsibilities of her Department will be for the maintenance of the royal naval college, Greenwich when the Ministry of Defence has left the site. [41193]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My Department is currently responsible for the maintenance of the external fabric of the royal naval college buildings together with the maintenance, including the interiors, of the painted hall and chapel. When the Ministry of Defence vacates the buildings, my Department will continue to contribute to the funding of these maintenance responsibilities. The level of funding and duration will be a matter for

agreement between the Department and the trust which is being established to take over the main lease on the buildings. I would expect the taxpayer's contribution to reduce as the trust generates income to meet the costs of maintenance. My Department will remain concerned to ensure that the buildings are maintained to a standard appropriate to their status.

Promotional Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much her Department has spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotions, and *(c)* hospitality in each year since its formation. [40619]

Mr. Sproat: The information requested is given in the following table:

£

	1992–93 (actual)	*1993–94 (actual)*	*1994–95 (actual)*	*1995–96 (actual)*	*1996–97 (spend to date)*
Publicity and promotions	nil	25,000	57,000	348,000	188,470
Hospitality	22,037	18,277	14,967	25,563	10,798

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many answers to *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by her Department in each of the past two years. [40637]

Mr. Sproat: This is a matter of public record.

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations have been received recently over the concessionary television licence for pensioners; and what were the main points in such representations. [40971]

Mr. Sproat: Since April 1996, we have received about 170 representations concerning the concessionary television licence available to certain pensioners.

The main points raised were specific queries on eligibility for the concession, calls for extending the scope of the scheme and proposals to abolish the concession in favour of a reduced fee licence for all pensioners.

National Lottery

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what has been the total income received from *(a)* national lottery tickets and *(b)* national lottery scratchcard sales in South Yorkshire; what proportion these figures represent of the total income nationally; and what percentage of national lottery awards funding has been received by South Yorkshire lottery. [40840]

Mr. Sproat: Figures on the sales of national lottery tickets and scratchcards in South Yorkshire are operational matters for Camelot Group plc. I have therefore asked the Director General of the National Lottery, to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

To date, 135 lottery awards—1.5 per cent. of the total—have been made to projects in South Yorkshire for a total of £67,336,877—2.98 per cent. of the total awarded.

Television Licence Fraud Hotline

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will set up a free phone hotline for the reporting of suspected television licence fraudsters; and if she will make a statement. [40872]

Mr. Sproat: No. The BBC is responsible for the administration and enforcement of the television licensing system, including policy on reducing licence evasion.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid Budget

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to increase the overseas aid budget; and if he will make a statement. [40773]

Dr. Liam Fox: In common with the budgets of other Departments, the ODA's budget for 1997–98 is currently under consideration in the public expenditure survey round, the outcome of which will not be known until the Chancellor's November Budget statement. At £2,154 million in 1996–97, the UK's development assistance programme is substantial and is internationally recognised for its quality, effectiveness and poverty focus.

TREASURY

Balance of Payments

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the disparity between his forecast for the balance of payments current account deficits in 1997 and the average of the forecasts made by the Panel of Independent Forecasters for 1997. [40728]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The latest Treasury forecast for the current account deficit in 1997 is £1½ billion, shown in the table 1.4 of the "Summer Economic Forecast". This lies within the range of forecasts provided by members of the Panel of Independent Forecasters, detailed in table 1A.1 of the same publication.

Self-assessment Computer System

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to make sure that the self-assessment computer system will have the comprehensive technical support necessary to put right promptly any faults that may occur in live operation. [41231]

Mr. Jack: Electronic Data Systems Ltd.—the Inland Revenue's information technology partner—will ensure that full technical support is provided by all companies contracted to supply components of the self assessment computer system. In particular Oracle, the company

supplying the software package for the database holding taxpayer records, will provide 24-hour support using its worldwide service network.

Such diagnostic and remedial work undertaken to support the system may at times necessitate specialist staff—either in the UK or, exceptionally, at Oracle facilities abroad—having access to copies of batches of taxpayer records. The handling of such confidential data will, as now, be governed by the strictest possible security arrangements to safeguard against misuse. The actual processing of individual's tax affairs and the development of the Inland Revenue's computer systems will continue to be undertaken wholly within the UK.

These comprehensive technical support arrangements will help ensure that the operation of the new self-assessment computer system is as trouble-free as possible.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will announce the results of the review by HM Customs and Excise of its next steps arrangements. [41232]

Mr. Oppenheim: Customs and Excise has been operating along next steps lines since 1991 when the bulk of the Department's operational staff were organised into executive units.

The Department currently has 24 executive units; 14 collections, national investigation service, national intelligence division, solicitor's office and seven other central operations or service units which together employ some 95 per cent. of their staff.

The Department and each executive unit has a framework document which contains statements of responsibilities and accountabilities. The review of its organisation and the impact of next steps clearly demonstrates that Customs and Excise continues to be fully committed to next steps principles. The outcome of the review is the publication today of the revised departmental document "HM Customs and Excise: Next Steps Framework Document 1996", copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Executive unit framework documents will be published before the House rises for the Christmas recess.

Public Debt

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the use of the general Government financial deficit as the principal measure of public debt. [40336]

Mr. Waldegrave: The general Government financial deficit is a national accounts measure of the deficit on the Government's current and capital accounts. As a national accounts measure, the GGFD follows internationally recognised guidelines, allowing international comparisons of government deficits. Partly for this reason, it was chosen as the deficits measure in the excessive deficit procedure set out in the Maastricht treaty. But most countries also use their own measure of the deficit when presenting their Budgets. The UK focuses on the public sector borrowing requirement as it is a measure of the net cash demand of the whole of the public sector on the rest of the economy. In addition, monthly PSBR figures are available about two weeks after the end of the period to which they relate, whereas the GGFD is available only quarterly and about three months after the end of the quarter. Forecasts of both are given in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report".

Privatisation

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what sums were *(a)* paid to and *(b)* received from public funds in (i) telephone and electronic communications, (ii) gas, (iii) electricity, (iv) public water services and (v) Royal Mail, for the year of and five years preceding the year of their disposal or 1995 as appropriate; and if he will make a statement. [40412]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the following documents, which set out the information available for each industry. Figures for external financing requirements can be found in "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1996–97" and its predecessor publications; including the "Statistical Supplement to the FSBR" and "Government Expenditure Plans". The EFR measures the difference between what an industry spends and the income from its trading and related activities; the most significant components of external finance are normally Government grants, subsidies and loans, and movements in deposits—which are normally liabilities of the public sector.

Figures for interest payments from the industries to the national loans fund are quoted in the "Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts".

Tax and dividend figures for all nationalised industries are available in "Inland Revenue Statistics" and the Office for National Statistics' Blue Book respectively; however, this information is not broken down on an industry-by-industry basis.

UK Bonds

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what steps his Department has taken to investigate the volume of United Kingdom bonds issued on the Swiss market which have subsequently been deemed to be defunct or in default; if he will list the United Kingdom banks and other financial institutions which have been approached to participate in such investigations; and what action his Department has taken; [40150]

(2) if he will list those United Kingdom bonds issued on the Swiss market since 1987 which have subsequently been deemed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Swiss authorities to be (i) defunct and (ii) in default, indicating the approximate value of each bond and all such bonds. [40151]

Mrs. Angela Knight: None that I am aware of.

Public Sector Borrowing

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the title and authorship of the documents used by Governments of the member states by the European Union in concluding that the percentage of public sector borrowing and debt as a proportion of gross national product should be those specified in the treaty of union, Maastricht. [40363]

Mr. Waldegrave: The Council, meeting in the form of Heads of State or Government, in accordance with article 109j of the EC treaty, will assess which countries fulfil the necessary conditions for the adoption of the single currency. In doing so, the Council will take account of reports prepared for this meeting by the Commission and the European Monetary Institute. Sound public finances, as detailed in article 104c of the treaty and in protocol No. 5 on the excessive deficit procedure, will form an important part of the assessment.

Diesel and Oxygenated Fuel

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the potential economic benefits deriving from environmental improvements of *(a)* City diesel and *(b)* oxygenated fuel; and what consideration he has given to the introduction of fiscal incentives to encourage their use. [40716]

Mr. Oppenheim: We keep the potential economic and environmental benefits of City diesel and oxygenated fuel under review. The Government do consider, where appropriate, the use of fiscal incentives to promote practices which are environmentally and economically beneficial, but each case is looked at on its merits.

Road Fund Licence Exemption

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the road fund licence exemption to allow variable concessions; and if he will make a statement. [40777]

Mr. Oppenheim: We keep under review the vehicle excise duty concessions and exemptions. Any statement on this will be made in the Budget.

Scotch Whisky

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has had concerning equalising the tax on Scotch whisky with that of other alcoholic drinks; and if he will make a statement. [40769]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has received representations from the Scotch Whisky Association and the Wine and Spirit Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Other interested groups and individuals have written or made representation through Members of Parliament to the Chancellor and other Treasury Ministers.

Each year, prior to making his Budget decisions, the Chancellor of the Exchequer reviews the levels of taxation on alcoholic beverages including spirits. consideration is given to a wide range of social, economic and health factors as well as the revenue effect. Any statement on this will be made in the Budget.

Abortion

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many abortions have been performed in total to women usually resident in the Trent region under the provisions of the Abortion Act 1967; and how many and what percentage of these abortions were performed in emergency to save the life of the mother. [40820]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The total number of abortions performed under the Abortion Act, to women usually resident in the Trent health region[1] from 1970 to 1994[2] was 245,489. During this period, nine abortions, 0.004 per cent. of the total number of abortions performed, were carried out in an emergency, certified by the operating practitioner as immediately necessary, to save the life of the woman[3].

[1] Figures are based, where possible, on 1994 health authority boundaries. Other boundary changes have not been reflected in the figures.

[2] Figures for 1968–69 are not held on a comparable basis.

[3] Abortions performed under statutory grounds 5 (1970–31 March 1991) and F (1 April–present day) that is, where in the case of emergency it was necessary to save the life of the woman.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown by gestation of the pregnancy of the abortions performed on women usually resident in the Trent region in the last year for which figures are available; and what were the comparable figures for each of the previous four years. [40821]

Mrs. Knight: The latest year for which abortion data by gestation of the pregnancy are available for women usually resident in the Trent health region is 1994. The data are presented in table 21 of the 1994 abortion statistics, series AB No. 21, HMSO publication 1996.

Comparable figures for each of the last four years, 1990 to 1993 inclusive, are available in table 24b (1990, 1991) and 24c (1992, 1993) in the following publications: 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, abortion statistics, England and Wales, series AB Nos. 17 to 21 respectively; HMSO publications 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996 respectively.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown by the procedure adopted of the number of abortions performed on women usually resident in the Trent region in the latest year for which he has figures; and what were the comparable figures for each of the last four years. [400874]

Mrs. Knight: The latest year for which abortion data by procedure are available for women usually resident in the Trent health region is 1994. The data are presented in table 18 of 1994 abortion statistics, series AB No. 21, HMSO publication 1996.

Comparable figures for each of the last four years, 1990 to 1993 inclusive, are available in table 22, in the following publications: 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993 abortion statistics, England and Wales, series AB Nos. 17 to 21 respectively; HMSO publications 1991, 1993, 1995, 1995, 1996 respectively.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown by age of the mother of abortions carried out on women usually resident in the Trent region in each of the last five years. [40833]

Mrs. Knight: A breakdown of legal terminations by age of mother usually resident in the Trent health region, for the years 1990 to 1994 inclusive are available in the following publications: 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994 abortion statistics, England and Wales, series AB Nos. 17 to 21 respectively; HMSO publications 1991, 1993, 1995, 1995, 1996 respectively.

Taxpayers' Incomes

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many and what percentage of taxpayers, whether employed or self-employed, have a gross income *(a)* above £100,000 annually, *(b)* between £60,000 and £100,000, *(c)* between £30,000 and £60,000 and *(d)* £10,000 and below. [40988]

Mr. Jack: Latest estimates for 1996–97 are given in the table.

Gross income[1] *£ per year*	*Number of taxpayers (thousands)*	*Percentage of taxpayers*
£10,000 and below	9,200	36
£30,000–£60,000	1,700	7
£60,000–£100,000	260	1
Over £100,000	140	under 1

[1] Defined as total income for income tax purposes.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Council of Ministers of the European Community will carry out the assessment, required by article 109j of the treaty, of whether the third stage of economic and monetary union can begin in 1997; and if, in relation to that process, the United Kingdom is required to notify its intentions. [41214]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Article 109j of the EC treaty requires that a formal assessment by the Council of Ministers of which member states meet the necessary conditions for the adoption of the single currency in 1997 should take place by the end of 1996. The European Council agreed at its meeting in Florence in June that member states will not be ready to adopt the single currency in 1997 and confirmed its commitment to the third stage of economic and monetary union starting in 1999 in line with the EC treaty. However, in accordance with its obligation under the EC treaty, the Council will carry out the assessment procedure under article 109j before the end of 1996.

Paragraph 1 of protocol No. 11 to the treaty requires the United Kingdom to notify its intentions in relation to the third stage before this assessment under article 109j is carried out. Accordingly, the Council has been notified by the United Kingdom's permanent representative that the United Kingdom does not intend to move to the third stage in 1997. A copy of the notification has been placed in the Library of both Houses.

This notification does not prejudge or affect in any way the future decision on the United Kingdom's participation in the third stage. Under the treaty, the United Kingdom is not committed and cannot be obliged to move to the third stage without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. The Government's policy remains that no decision will be taken either way on participation in the third stage during the lifetime of the current Parliament because sufficient information to make a full assessment of the implications for the United Kingdom will not be available.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear Test Ban Committee

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will arrange for a report on the outcome of the negotiations in the Nuclear Test Ban Committee of the Untied Nationals Conference on Disarmament, which resumed on 29 July, to be put in the Library as soon as it becomes available. [39917]

Mr. David Davis: The Conference on Disarmament issued a report on 12 September. A copy will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

EU Directives

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the numbers of *(a)* regulation and *(b)* directives which have been (i) operative in United Kingdom law since 1 January 1973, (ii) introduced between 1973 and 1986 and (iii) introduced since 1986. [40411]

Mr. David Davis: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly. Copies of the letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Embassies

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what facilities have been provided to Prince Michael of Kent for business visits by British embassies over the past five years; and what is the estimated cost of those facilities; [40455]

(2) if he will make a statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government in the provision of facilities by British embassies to private individuals on business trips. [40456]

Mr. Rifkind: The detailed information sought could be provided only after considerable research, which would involve disproportionate costs. The facilities offered by British embassies to Prince Michael of Kent and those accompanying him have been similar to those available for other British business visitors. These generally include advice on programmes and briefing on political background and commercial opportunities in the relevant market sectors. When appropriate, senior officers also accompany and sometimes lobby on behalf of senior British visitors during calls on local authorities. Hospitality is at times provided in order to effect introductions.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what facilities were provided to Prince Michael of Kent on his business visit to Beijing in September; who approved the provision of such facilities; under what arrangements such facilities were provided; to what other citizens of the United Kingdom such facilities are made available; and if he will make a statement. [40457]

Mr. Rifkind: Prince Michael of Kent was invited by the People's Institute of Foreign Affairs in Peking to lead a delegation of senior representatives of British companies active in China. PIFA was responsible for the

arrangements, including travel and accommodation in China. The delegation met its own costs for travel to and from China.

The embassy provided briefing and assistance consistent with the seniority of the group and the reception accorded by the Chinese Government. The ambassador accompanied His Royal Highness on his call on the Premier, Li Peng, and the group was accompanied during the visit by a commercial officer on his staff.

Our embassy in Peking seeks to provide appropriate assistance to all British business delegations visiting China. The facilities the embassy provides to business visitors are tailored to their programme and their individual requirements.

Pakistani Diplomats

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many diplomats have been expelled from the Pakistani high commission in 1996 as a result of their procurement on nuclear technology. [40494]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: No diplomats of the Pakistan high commission have been expelled from the UK in 1996. However, a member of the high commission's local staff was deported in July of that year.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what invitation he had for the International Bar Association to be represented at its conference in London on 9 September on Lockerbie; and why he declined. [40707]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary was not invited. A number of officials were invited, but did not attend. The Government's position on the trial of those accused of the Lockerbie bombing is well known: the two accused must stand trial in Scotland or in the United States.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many answers to *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by his Department in each of the past two years. [40632]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: This is a matter of public record.

Sudan

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Government of Sudan about the lack of religious tolerance in their country, with particular reference to the persecution of Christians; and if he will make a statement. [40763]

Dr. Lian Fox: Freedom of worship is a fundamental human right. We are very concerned by disturbing reports of forced islaminisation in Sudan. We frequently make clear our concerns, and those of the British Parliament and people, about human rights and abuses in Sudan. The Minister of State Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), did so most recently to the Sudanese ambassador on 2 July.

Promotional Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department has spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotions, and *(c)* hospitality in each of the last six years. [40625]

Dr. Liam Fox: *(a)* and *(b)*: Total expenditure on publicity—that is, promotional material and recruitment advertising—in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, diplomatic wing and Overseas Development Administration, in each of the last six years was:

1990–91: £1,825,882

1991–92: £1,785,388

1992–93: £2,033,000

1993–94: £2,130,264

1994–95: £2,320,000

1995–96: £2,442,763.

(c) I refer the hon. Member to the answer the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) gave to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 1 February, *Official Report*, column *857-58*.

Acts of Parliament (Updating)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what means a citizen of the United Kingdom can refer to any Act of Parliament in force to which is added, or incorporated, the texts of amendments to current law occasioned by regulations of the European Economic Community, stating by whom such updating is maintained, where it is done, what is its cost and which vote of the estimates defrays this expenditure. [40797]

Mr. David Davis: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly. Copies of the letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Li Langing (Visit)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the dates and purpose of the visit planned by the Chinese Vice-Premier Li Langing to the United Kingdom. [41062]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), shall write to the hon. Member shortly. Copies of the letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Tibet

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what considerations led him not to raise the issue of Tibet at his recent meeting with the Chinese Foreign Minister; and if he will make a statement. [41064]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), shall write to the hon. Member shortly. Copies of the letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Unidentified Flying Objects

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what consultation has taken place in each of the last five years by his Department with the French Service de Documentation Exterieur et de Contre-Espionnage in respect of unidentified flying objects; and if he will make a statement; [40970]

(2) if he will list by month for each of the last 10 years, and this year to date, the number of occasions that MI6 has monitored unidentified flying objects investigations; and if he will make a statement; [40981]

(3) if he will list by month for each of the last 10 years and this year to date the number of occasions on which the Government Communications headquarters has monitored unidentified flying object investigations; and if he will make a statement. [40922]

Mr. David Davis: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly. Copies of the letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41178]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), shall write to the hon. Member shortly. Copies of the letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

New Buildings and Premises

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by his Department and its agencies; and if he will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41144]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), shall write to the hon. Member shortly. Copies of the letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Telephone Interceptions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for each of the last 12 months the number of *(a)* interceptions and *(b)* monitorings of telephone calls (i) entering or (ii) leaving the United Kingdom, through the joint Government Communications headquarters—National Security Agency agreement; and if he will make a statement. [40972]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), shall write to the hon. Member shortly. Copies of the letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom policy on the use of nuclear weapons of the decision of the International Court of Justice on nuclear weapons. [41224]

Mr. David Davis: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly. Copies of the letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what capacity of electricity used in his Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans he has to increase that capacity. [41321]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), will write to the hon. Member shortly. Copies of the letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

DEFENCE

Religious Discrimination (Caterick Camp)

Mr. Gabraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reports he has received of religious discrimination at Catterick camp during June and July; and if he will make a statement. [40766]

Mr. Soames: There have been no reported incidents of religious discrimination at Catterick Camp during June and July. However, we treat any allegations of discrimination extremely seriously and if the hon. Member can provide any information which suggests that religious discrimination has taken place at Catterick Camp it will, of course, be fully investigated.

Suicides

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 16 May to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr Clark), *Official Report*, column 559, if he will break down the number of suicides in the armed forces by *(a)* year and *(b)* service for each year since 1991. [40767]

Mr. Soames: Since January 1991 the total number of service personnel who have been confirmed as committing suicide is 130, which is broken down as follows:

Year	Army	Royal Navy[1]	RAF
1991	22	5	7
1992	19	6	5
1993	18	1	4
1994	17	6	5
1995	12	1	2

[1] Includes the Royal Marines.

Figures are not yet available for 1996.

The total figure given in the answer to the hon. Member for South Shields of 16 May, *Official Report*, column *559*, was 135. This original figure has subsequently been amended to reflect the rulings of coroners courts.

Beef Purchases

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of beef supplied to service personnel in the British armed forces in the last year and purchased by his Department was purchased *(a)* from United Kingdom sources, *(b)* from other European Union sources and *(c)* from the rest of the world; and if he will make a statement. [40440]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Since 1 October 1994 the supply of food for the armed services has been the responsibility of the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes, NAAFI. My Department does not specify sources from which meat should be obtained, but NAAFI is required to meet the specification and achieve best value for money. The majority of our requirements are, however, for frozen beef which is not readily available from the British market and on cost grounds the majority of meat is sourced from south America and eastern Europe. Nevertheless, some beef including sirloin, foreribs, minced and diced and a range of manufactured products are normally procured from UK sources.

Prior to 1994, beef was purchased directly by my Department, but no records were kept of the quantities sourced by a particular country, although the majority was imported from south America.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now make it his policy to investigate media allegations of cases of the Gulf war syndrome if invited to do so in parliamentary questions from hon. Members. [40734]

Mr. Soames: Our first duty, and prime concern, is to the health of those veterans who served in the Gulf, and we will of course explore any information made available which may have affected the health of those veterans. The proper means for the medical examination of Gulf veterans who are concerned about their health, is the medical assessment programme which we established in 1993. I urge any veteran who has such concerns and has not yet been seen by the MAP to come forward as soon as possible.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new assessment his Department has made of the possible effects of fluorine on Gulf war military and medical veterans since the reply of 24 October 1994, *Official Report*, column *500*. [40750]

Mr. Soames: No assessment has been made of the possible effects of fluorine on Gulf war veterans. No evidence of the effects of fluorine has been found among any of the UK Gulf war veterans examined under my Department's medical assessment programme.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the memorandum on the discovery of mustard gas during the Gulf war by the commander of the 54 Chemical Troop, dated 4 January 1994, has now been discovered and assessed. [40751]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information on the environmental effects of organophosphates his Department has received from the United States Government in regard to the joint research being conducted on the implications of organophosphate use in Operation Granby in the Gulf war. [40736]

Mr. Soames: My Department is liaising closely with the United States Government on all aspects of research into the health of Gulf war veterans. It has received information on the United States Government's assessment of the health effects on US forces of organophosphate use during the Gulf war, and on associated work being conducted as part of their research programme into Gulf war illnesses. No joint US-UK research is being conducted into organophosphate use during the Gulf war.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what quality control was conducted on the organophosphate pesticides purchased by his Department to combat fly-borne diseases in the Gulf war; and what post-war assessment has been made on the effect on the local environment in Kuwait and southern Iraq of the use of pesticides during Operation Granby. [40738]

Mr. Soames: The organophosphate pesticides, malathion and fenitrothion, were approved for use at the time of Operation Granby under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986. ALFACRON, containing the organophosphate azamathiphos, and purchased locally in the Gulf, was also approved for use under these regulations. SNIP, a similar product purchased locally containing azamathiphos, was licensed for use in the United States, but it is understood that no application has been made for approval in the UK. A further organophosphate pesticide purchased locally, neocidal, is understood to have been supplied in error in response to an order for a non-organophosphate pesticide.

My Department is not aware of any post-war assessment of the effect of the use of pesticides on the local environment in Kuwait and southern Iraq during Operation Granby.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Gulf war veteran service people and medical support staff have been found to suffer from brainstem encephalitis; and what assessment has been made of the relationship between incidences of brainstem encephalitis in Gulf war veterans and the environment of the Gulf war. [40746]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 15 October 1996]:* There have been no reported cases of Gulf war veterans suffering from brainstem encephahlitis. No assessment has therefore been made of a possible link between brainstem encephalitis and the environment of the Gulf.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what medical studies have been conducted by his Department on the effects on human health and the environment of the organophosphate pesticides malathion, diazinon, azamathiphos and dimethyl phosphorothionate prior to their use in Operation Granby in the Gulf war. [40745]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 15 October 1996]:* No medical studies on the organophosphate pesticides malathion, diazinon, azamathiphos and dimethyl phosphorothionate were conducted by my Department prior to the Gulf war.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by his Department in each of the past two years. [40628]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not collected.

Exercises (Ebford)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 4 December 1995, *Official Report*, column 2, what members of the armed forces were deployed in the vicinity of Ebford village during autumn 1988; and if he will make a statement. [40645]

Mr. Soames: No personnel of the Royal Marines Command were deployed for any purpose in the vicinity of Ebford village during the autumn of 1988.

Promotional Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotions, and *(c)* hospitality in each of the last six years. [40621]

Mr. Soames: Details of central MOD expenditure on publicity and service recruitment advertising for 1990–91 to 1993–94 are published in the annual MOD departmental reports, Cm 2201 (page 31), Cm 2501 (page 36) and Cm 2801 (page 39). The outturn for 1994–95 and the latest estimate for 1995–96 have been published in the MOD performance report for 1994–95, Cm 3055 (page 43). Copies of the relevant publications are available in the Library of the House.

In respect of hospitality, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 30 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *604–605*. The outturn for 1995–96 was £5.13 million.

Nuclear Materials (Transport)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what environmental assessments his Department has conducted on the transport of nuclear materials to and from the United States of America from the United Kingdom undertaken within the provisions of the 1958 mutual defence agreement on atomic energy matters as amended. [40747]

Mr. Soames: I am not aware of any requirement for environmental assessments in this context; none has therefore been carried out. Whenever nuclear materials are transported by the UK, they are carried in containers which are designed, manufactured and tested in conformity with the appropriate International Atomic Energy Agency regulations.

Biological Warfare Agents

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now review his policy regarding the release of details of the countermeasures taken against biological warfare agents by Her Majesty's armed forces during conflict. [40733]

Mr. Soames: The protection of British personnel is our prime concern in times of conflict. Details of the medical countermeasures taken by the armed forces against biological warfare agents during conflicts, therefore, remain appropriately classified, in order to avoid informing potential adversaries of the UK's strengths and weaknesses in dealing with the threat of biological weapons. We are, however, considering whether any information can be released after conflicts have ended.

War Graves (Singapore)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the desecration of war graves in Singapore. [40933]

Mr. Soames: My Department is unaware of the desecration of any war graves in Singapore. Where war graves are disturbed or sullied, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which is responsible for the marking and continuing maintenance of all such graves, should be contacted. It will arrange for the grave to be restored to its previous standard with all due care and respect.

SCOTLAND

Parole System

12. Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his proposals to reform the parole system in Scotland. [38717]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We are determined that criminals should serve the sentences given by the courts and should be allowed reductions only if they earn it. Our proposals were outlined in our White Paper and we will introduce legislation at an early date.

16. Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the future financing of further education. [38723]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Our policies have created a strong further education sector. Levels of student activity rose by 6 per cent. in the year following incorporation and present funding plans allow for continuing growth in student numbers through increasingly efficient colleges.

Forest Roads

18. Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received about weight restrictions imposed on forest roads in the highlands; and if he will make a statement. [38725]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office Development Department received five representations in 1995 concerning proposed weight restriction orders published by the former Highland regional council.

Newmilns Bypass

19. Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when work is planned to start on the Newmilns bypass; and what plans he has to involve the private finance initiative in the project. [38726]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The A71, on which Newmilns stands, is a local road. Proposals for improvements at Newmilns are therefore a matter for East Ayrshire council as the local roads authority for the area.

Unemployment

20. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to meet Scottish Enterprise to discuss unemployment in Scotland. [38727]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend and I regularly meet Scottish Enterprise to discuss a wide variety of issues concerning the Scottish economy.

Inward Investment

21. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about inward investment in Scotland. [38728]

Mr. Kynoch: Inward investment in Scotland has been running at record levels over the past two years and this success is continuing. Firms like Hyundai, Chunghwa, Lite-On, Simple Technology and Rohr recognise that locating in Scotland means locating in one of Europe's most competitive business locations.

"Crime and Punishment"

22. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what responses he has received to his White Paper, "Crime and Punishment", Cm 3302; and if he will make a statement. [38729]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A considerable number of detailed and helpful submissions were received in response to the White Paper. My right hon. Friend is currently giving careful consideration to all the views expressed and plans to bring forward legislation at an early date.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

23. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to extend the operation of nursery vouchers in Scotland. [38730]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The pre-school education voucher initiative is currently being piloted in four local authority areas in Scotland. It will be extended to the whole of Scotland from August next year.

30. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of pilot schemes for nursery vouchers in Scotland. [38739]

Mr. Robertson: The pilot schemes of the pre-school education initiative in Scotland have been under way for barely two months, but already there are indications that they are progressing well: over 150 centres have been admitted to the system, and vouchers have been issued for over 95 per cent. of eligible children. My right hon. Friend's final assessment will be informed by the implementation evaluation conducted by Stirling university, and also by the findings of HM inspectors of schools in the course of their inspections during the pilot phase.

Crofting

24. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he is pursuing to promote crofting in Scotland. [38731]

Mr. Robertson: On 10 October my right hon. Friend announced the publication of draft legislation which would give all crofters on his estates a unique opportunity to control their own land.

Waste Disposal

25. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to encourage local authorities to find alternatives to landfill as a method of waste disposal. [38733]

Mr. Kynoch: The Government have introduced measures to encourage recycling and waste reduction as alternatives to landfill. These include the recycling credits scheme operated by local authorities and the landfill tax, which will encourage waste producers to examine their option for dealing with waste.

Departmental Employees

26. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are currently employed in the Scottish Office; what was the figure in May 1979; in each case at what cost in 1996 prices; and if he will make a statement. [38734]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Eight thousand two hundred and thirty–three people were employed in the Scottish Office, excluding the Scottish Prison Service, at 1 April 1996. In the same period, numbers in the Prison Service rose from 2,582 to 4,439.

The current staff costs are £109 million for the Scottish Office, excluding the Scottish Prison Service, and 85.3 million for the Scottish Prison Service: it is not possible except at disproportionate cost to produce accurate figures for 1979 on a fully comparable basis.

Housing (Glasgow)

27. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet Glasgow city council to discuss the housing situation in the city. [38735]

Mr Raymond S Robertson: I have met representatives of Glasgow city council on several occasions during the past year and officials from the Department are due to meet the council at the end of the month to discuss housing matters.

Economic Prospects

28. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received from businesses in Scotland about prospects for the Scottish economy. [38736]

Mr. Kynoch: Business confidence in Scotland remains high and economic prospects are excellent.

Fishing Industry

29. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the future of the Scottish fishing industry. [38738]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Scottish fishing industry makes a vital contribution to the social and economic welfare of Scotland's coastal communities. With fish stocks under increasing pressure, we need to safeguard the industry's future through better management and conservation. The Government are determined to secure whatever improvements in the common fisheries policy may be necessary to that end.

NHS Employees

31. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many nurses, doctors and dentists were employed by the national health service in Scotland in 1980 and in 1995. [38740]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The whole-time equivalent number of nurses and midwives has increased from 27,398 in 1980 to 35,378 in 1995, a rise of 29 per cent.; hospital and community medical staff have increased from 5,629 in 1980 to 6,849 in 1995, a rise of 22 per cent.; hospital and community dental staff have reduced from 525 in 1980 to 446 in 1995, a drop of 15 per cent.

Feudal Superiors

32. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes in legislation he proposes to limit the powers of feu superiors in Scotland. [38741]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Law Commission is considering proposals to abolish or amend the remaining aspects of the feudal system and will report in due course. The Government are committed to completing the reform of the feudal system, but would not wish to proceed in advance of the commission's report.

General Practitioner Fundholding

33. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how may GP fundholding practices there are in Scotland. [38742]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Three hundred and eighty-one.

Prison Sentences

34. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his proposals to make prisoners liable to serve the full terms of their sentences in Scotland. [38743]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We are determined that criminals should serve the sentences given by the courts and should be allowed reductions only if they earn it. Our proposals were outlined in our White Paper and we will introduce legislation at an early date.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss local government finance. [38724]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend and I will next meet COSLA on 8 November.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what invitation the Crown Office had from the International Bar Association to be represented at its conference on Lockerbie on 9 September; and why he declined. [40706]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate, or in his place a representative from the Crown Office, did receive an invitation to attend this conference. It was, however, inappropriate for my noble and learned Friend, as head of the independent prosecution service in Scotland or anyone on his behalf, to attend the conference. The Government's position on the trial of those accused of the Lockerbie bombing is, in any event, well known. Trial of the two Libyan accused should be in Scotland or the United States.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what initiatives between July and October 1996 the Crown Office has taken to resolve the issues raised by the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie. [38901]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Crown Office has maintained its preparedness for the trial of the two accused in the Lockerbie case.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many answers to *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by his Department in each of the past two years. [40640]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This is a matter of public record.

Ministerial Visits (Catalonia)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make an official visit to Catalonia in order to study its system of government. [38716]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I will bear the hon. Member's suggestion in mind.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Publicity

Ms Hodge: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the cost of staff employed full-time or part-time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work on the press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94. [39434]

Mr. Boswell: The budget allocations for staff employed full-time or part-time (i) to provide information and publicity and (ii) to work on the press and media in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1993–94 was as follows:

	Publicity £	*Press* £
1995–96	680,592	262,645
1994–95	539,099	300,933
1993–94	592,048	298,104

Ms Hodge: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the cost budgeted for staff, employed full-time or part-time, to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39438]

Mr. Boswell: The budget allocation for staff employed full-time or part-time to provide information and publicity in 1996–97 is £632,600. The figure does not include those working on press and media, nor administration support staff.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his Department's budget in 1996–97 for consultants to assist with information, publicity, press and media. [39354]

Mr. Boswell: Nil.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many staff are assumed in his Department's budget to be employed (i) full-time and (ii) part-time, *(a)* to work on press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97. [39382]

Mr. Boswell: The number of MAFF staff being employed (i) full-time and (ii) part-time, *(a)* to work on press and media and *(b)* to provide information and publicity in 1996–97 are as follows:

Press: 7

Publicity: 22.

Administration support staff are not included.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many staff were employed full-time or part-time *(a)* to provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94. [39414]

Mr. Boswell: The number of staff employed by MAFF, both full-time and part-time, to *(a)* provide information and publicity and *(b)* on press and media in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1993–94, were as follows:

	Press	*Publicity*
1995–96	7	25
1994–95	9	22
1993–94	9	23

Administration support staff are not included.

Beef Sales

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the level of beef sales in Britain, and in each of the other EU countries on *(a)* 1 April and *(b)* the latest available date in each case. [30152]

Mrs. Browning: According to a consumer survey conducted on behalf of the Meat and Livestock Commission, overall household purchases for the four-week period ending 10 March were 19,561 tonnes valued at £90,519. This was the last consumer survey produced before the Minister's announcement on the 20 March. For the latest available four-week period ending on 22 September, overall household purchases of beef were 15,893 tonnes valued at £71,862.

For other member states, information on beef consumption is not held centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that beef consumption in France, Germany, Italy, Belgium and Holland, and across the EU, is well below normal levels.

Computerised Cattle Database

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to introduce a national computerised cattle database; and if he will make a statement. [32963]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* The Government are working with urgency on plans for the accelerated introduction of a national cattle movements database. A feasibility study is underway.

Animal Feed (Advice)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many of the advisers and consultants who advised his Department on policy and regulatory requirements in relation to the composition of animal feed were *(a)* full-time Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food officials, *(b)* part-time Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food officials or *(c)* outside appointment; [32329]

(2) if he will list the names of the advisers and consultancies who advised his Department on policy and regulatory requirements in relation to the composition of animal feed in each year since 1986. [32328]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* The information requested on all advisors and consultants including Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food officials could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The interdepartmental Committee on Animal Feedingstuffs advises on the composition and labelling of feedingstuffs. Eleven of its members are full-time officials—including technical experts—of MAFF or its agencies and five members are full-time officials of other Government Departments. The interdepartmental group

on new feed developments reviews new developments concerning animal feed materials, manufacturing processes and animal feeding practices. It also draws its expertise from officials in MAFF and other Government Departments.

The Veterinary Products Committee and the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee provide independent expert advice on certain aspects of the composition of animal feedingstuffs.

Independent committees which have completed their work are the working party on bovine spongiform encephalopathy—the Southwood committee—and the Consultative Committee on Research into Spongiform Encephalopathies—the Tyrrell committee. In addition, the expert group on animal feedingstuffs under the Chairmanship of Professor Eric Lamming reviewed the regulatory framework covering the animal feed industry and reported in 1992.

I will write separately to the hon. Member with membership details of the independent committees and the expert group.

Rendering Processes (Canterbury)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons his Department has not responded to Canterbury city council's statutory consultation procedures concerning rendering processes at Canterbury Mills; and if he will make a statement.[33135]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 June 1996]:* A letter on this matter was sent to Canterbury city council on 26 July, following detailed and extensive assessment of the processes employed at Canterbury Mills.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the French Government alleging that French cattle have contracted BSE from eating feedstuffs supplied from the United Kingdom; and what evidence he has evaluated on this matter. [35714]

Mrs. Browning: We have received no representations from the French Government about the possibility that French cattle have contracted BSE from eating feedstuffs supplied from the UK or containing UK-sourced raw materials.

Mammalian-derived meat and bonemeal could legitimately be used in feed for pigs and poultry up to 29 March 1996. It was in free circulation and could quite legitimately be exported to other member states for similar use. The UK informed the Commission and other member states of the measures it was taking to introduce a ruminant feed ban in July 1988 and the reasons for this. It was, however, for the Commission to introduce controls across the Community, and for other member states to introduce their own domestic regulations. The feeding of meat and bonemeal to bovines was prohibited in France from July 1990 and extended to include all ruminants in December 1994.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of *(a)* how long the prions involved in BSE survive (i) in water, (ii) in soil and (iii) in stored meat and bonemeal and *(b)* their general stability or degradation characteristics. [34508]

Mrs. Browning: The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, which advises Government on all aspects of the spongiform encephalopathies, has reviewed all the environmental aspects and issued a statement following its meeting on 29 May. This was published under cover of a Ministry of Agriculture press notice of 7 June. A copy of that press notice is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Wakefield of 19 June, *Official Report*, column *499*, what research he has evaluated indicating how gelatin processed from bovine skin and bone is free from risk of contamination; and what account this research took of the resistance of the BSE agent to *(a)* heat and *(b)* caustic soda. [34779]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 1 July 1996]:* Considerable research effort has gone into determining the extent to which various bovine tissues may harbour the BSE infective agent. No infectivity has ever been detected in bovine hides or bones, and the raw materials from which gelatin is made would not therefore be expected to be contaminated with BSE agent. Published research has examined the ability of various stages in the manufacture of gelatin to remove or inactivate the infective agent, in the unlikely event that any were present in the raw materials. The application of caustic substances and heat are only elements in the overall process, which must be examined as a whole in determining the likely reduction in infectivity which would result. All the available evidence, along with full details of the processes employed in producing gelatin and information provided on a confidential basis by the gelatin manufacturers of Europe, was considered by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee in arriving at its conclusions about the safety of gelatin.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he will take to ensure that smaller beef producers are not made bankrupt by the present BSE eradication arrangements; and what assessment he has made of the extent to which beef producers are making a loss when steers are marketed. [38096]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* I am fully aware that current market prices for all beef cattle are substantially lower than those at the same time last year and am conscious of the enormous strain this has put on beef producers.

The Government agreed a package of addition support measures for beef producers at the June Agriculture Council worth some £110 million in the UK. Most of the money, some £81 million, is being paid as supplements under the beef premium schemes. A large proportion of the income of beef producers comes from suckler, cow premium, beef special premium and HLCA payments. Increases in these payments are therefore reducing the impact of lower cattle prices on producers incomes. Over 90 per cent. of claimants will have already received their supplements. The remainder will be paid by early October.

The Government have also arranged for beef producers to receive 80 per cent. rather than the normal 60 per cent. rate of advance payments under the beef premium schemes from 1 November. This should ensure additional funds are in the pockets of beef producers in the crucial autumn period.

In addition, some £29 million has been made available under the 1996 beef marketing payment scheme. This money is being distributed to beef producers according to the number of adult clean cattle—including steers, heifers and young bulls—sold in the period 20 March to 30 June (inclusive) for slaughter for human consumption. The application period for this scheme closed on 23 August and payment will be at a flat rate of £66.76 per eligible animal. The first payments under this scheme began earlier this month and it is hoped they will be completed by 15 October.

While the measures that I have outlined should relieve some of the financial pressures currently facing the beef industry, they are not designed as compensation for the fall in market prices. They are market support measures designed to ensure the survival of the industry. In the longer term, we would hope that as public confidence increases and the market adjusts to the situation, the incomes of beef producers will gradually recover.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what powers he has to prevent imports of beef from EU countries where he believes BSE is endemic and where the brain and spinal column are not removed from the carcase. [23998]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 2 April 1996]:* Member states of the EU have power to take interim protective measures under article 9 of Council Directive 89/662/EEC pending the adoption of EU legislation where there is an outbreak of disease in the territory of another member state.

The United Kingdom has asked the Commission to adopt Community-wide controls on the removal of specified bovine offal from cattle carcases.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he took to inform abattoirs and renderers *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in the EU of the decision to ban the use of thymus and intestines of calves under six months old. [35750]

Mrs. Browning: In the United Kingdom, the trade associations representing abattoir owners and renderers were consulted on the Government's decision to extend the specified bovine offal ban to include thymus and intestines of calves under six months of age. Renderers and abattoirs in other member states were not informed directly by the Ministry of the changes. The Commission was, however, notified of the Government's intention in accordance with EC directive 83/189 (as amended) laying down a procedure for the provision of information in the field of technical standards and regulations.

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to assist farmers who are caught by the BSE culling backlog with the cost of winter feed; and if he will make a statement. [40813]

Mrs. Browning: A number of representations have been received about the introduction of a feed subsidy for cattle awaiting slaughter under the over 30-month scheme, which are being studied.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the level of under-reporting of cases of BSE in those countries which export cattle to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [40128]

Mrs. Browning: BSE is a notifiable disease in all member states.

Apart from the UK, BSE has been confirmed in homebred cattle in France, Portugal, Switzerland and the Republic of Ireland. Since 1986, the UK has imported cattle from three of these countries: France, Switzerland and the Republic of Ireland. We have no evidence that under-reporting of BSE cases occurs in these countries.

Specified Bovine Offal

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the extent to which local control adequately ensures that mechanical recovery of meat takes place with the minimum possible contamination from specified bovine offal; and if he will make a statement. [34108]

Mrs. Browning: Specified bovine materials have to be removed from all cattle at slaughter and are destroyed. In addition, in December 1995 the use of the bovine vertebral column for the production of mechanically recovered meat was prohibited. This was a precautionary measure to prevent a risk of potential contamination of MRM by small lengths of spinal cord accidentally left attached to the vertebral column. This ensures that no specified bovine material can enter mechanically recovered meat, even accidentally.

Farming Population

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the farming population of the European Union. [35779]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 10 July 1996]:* The Community survey on the structure of agricultural holdings in 1993 showed that there were some 15 million farming jobs—excluding casual workers and contractors—in the 12 member states. Some workers will hold jobs on different holdings. Further information is contained in "Statistics in Focus—Agriculture, forestry and fisheries" published by Eurostat.

Herds

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number and percentage of herds in the United Kingdom which are closed. [37389]

Mrs. Browning: There are currently no accurate statistics available on the number of closed herds. The Agricultural Development and Advisory Service estimates that the percentage of UK herds that are closed (i) in the beef and dairy sectors are:

Dairy herds 45–55 per cent closed

Beef herds (suckler cows): 5–10 per cent. closed

(i) that is herds which have not brought in any female animals in the last five years.

Internet

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37228]

Mr. Boswell: MAAF has published a number of documents electronically to coincide with the release of the printed publication. The Department is looking at expanding the range of information which it places on the Internet.

Beef Farmers

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he is taking to ensure that beef farmers who have been selling steers, heifers and young bulls since March, receive a share of the £29.4 million agreed for distribution to United Kingdom producers in special difficulties. [36743]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* Some £29 million has been allocated to a system of national aid measures. This money will be distributed to beef producers and under the beef marketing payment scheme, according to the number of adult clean cattle sold in the period 20 March to 30 June for slaughter for human consumption. The application period for this scheme closed on 23 August 1991. More than 29,000 claims were submitted in respect of some 450,000 animals throughout the United Kingdom. All of these claims have now been processed and the rate of payment has been fixed at £66.76 per eligible animal. The first payments began earlier this month and it is hoped they will all be completed by 15 October.

Sheep Dips

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the safety and effectiveness of lindane-based sheep dips with particular reference to their performance relative to organophosphorus dips; what conclusions he has drawn from the recent pesticides safety directorate review of lindane (gamma HCH); and if he will make a statement. [37802]

Mrs. Browning: Licences authorising the use of lindane-based sheep dips were revoked in 1984. There has been no application for a marketing authorisation for lindane-based sheep dips since then and no assessment of the safety or effectiveness of such veterinary medicines have been undertaken subsequently in the United Kingdom.

The independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides concluded, in February, a very thorough review of the uses of lindane as an agricultural pesticide regulated under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985. The Committee recommended that all approvals of lindane for such agricultural uses should continue subject to certain further steps being taken to protect lindane users, improvements to product labelling and the subsequent submission of further data. Ministers in all the regulatory Departments have accepted these recommendations which are being implemented.

Ketamin

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the veterinary anaesthetic drug ketamin is available in the United Kingdom; what safeguards he has issued to ensure that the drug does not become available to young people; and if he will make a statement. [38327]

Mrs. Browning: Ketamine hydrochloride is the active ingredient in three veterinary medicines with current marketing authorisations. It is authorised, for use as an anaesthetic for cats—two products—and sub-human primates—one product. In each of these cases, the product is authorised in the category of veterinary medicine available only on prescription, and as such would be used only under the direct control of a veterinary surgeon. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons has published a code of practice for storage and dispensing of medicines by veterinary surgeons which includes a requirement that premises in which medicines are stored and dispensed should be capable of being secured to exclude the public and to deter unlawful entry.

European Fisheries Council

Mr. Harris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the European Fisheries Council in Luxembourg. [41157]

Mr. Baldry: I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Fisheries Council in Luxembourg on 14 October together with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland.

The Council discussed the principles underlying Commission proposals for substantial further capacity reductions in Community fishing fleets in the next series of multi-annual guidance programmes to run from 1997–2002. Most member states expressed concern about the rates of reduction proposed, the way these would impact on particular fleet segments and the consequences for employment and the economy of coastal communities. I also made it clear that the UK could not implement further compulsory fleet reductions while the quota-hopping problem remained unresolved and drew attention to the burning sense of injustice which the present situation caused in the British fishing industry.

It was concluded that further detailed examination of all elements of the Commission proposal would be needed before decisions could be taken. There was, however, general recognition of the need for fishing mortality to be

reduced to acceptable levels for critical stocks and for this to be done in ways which are appropriate, equitable and soundly based. This would include consideration of policies other than capacity reduction, such as technical conservation and enforcement. It would also include careful assessment of the effects of reductions in fishing activity on the industry and those dependent on it.

The Council also took note of the Commission's report on implementation to date of the existing multi-annual guidance programmes, with the proviso that the figures for a number of member states, including the UK, needed correction, in particular in relation to tonnage measurement.

Ministers had a first exchange of views on the Commission's proposal for new technical conversation measures. There were many reservations about the proposal but general agreement on the need to improve the current measures in order to conserve stocks and reduce discards. It was also accepted that the measures eventually agreed must command the confidence of the industry and therefore be based on sound scientific advice, easily understood and enforceable.

The Council discussed the Commission proposal on satellite monitoring. I pressed for harmonised implementation by all member states and the need to guard against fishermen being unfairly penalised in respect of genuine equipment failures. I also requested that the Commission should explore ways in which satellite monitoring could reduce the regulatory burden on fishermen. In the light of the many detailed concerns raised by member states, it was concluded that the matter should be referred for further detailed examination.

The Council agreed unanimously a proposal consolidating regulations laying down common marketing standards for fish and fisheries products. It makes minor modifications to grading standards. It also provides for the ending of Community financial compensation for lower quality 'B' grade fish with effect from 1 January 2000 and subject to a review after one year.

The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland reminded the Council of the difficulties that salmon farmers are facing in the critical marketing period before Christmas as a result of low prices. He emphasised the importance of the Commission's investigation of complaints about dumping and unfair subsidies in Norway resolving these recurring difficulties.

The Council also agreed by qualified majority, with Italy and Spain voting against, a measure raising the ceiling on beef intervention purchases for 1996 by 60,000 tonnes and providing new intervention arrangements for store cattle until December.

Gelatine (Parliamentary Questions)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the hon. Member for Wakefield can expect answers to his questions for answer on 4 June, 19 June and 25 June in respect of gelatine. [38092]

Mrs. Browning: I have replied to the hon. Member for Wakefield's questions in respect of gelatine on 18 July, columns *638*, and 24 July, column *628*.

Equines

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many equines were exported for slaughter for food in the past year; and if he will make a statement. [36684]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* I very much regret that my hon. Friend has had to wait so long for a reply.

No equines were exported for slaughter for food in the past year.

EU Standing Veterinary Committee

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the minutes of the meeting of the EU Standing Veterinary Committee of 9 and 10 October 1990. [37867]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 22 July 1996]:* I have deposited in the Library of the House the report of this meeting as issued to member states by the EC Commission.

Beef

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the independence of the members of the EU Committee of Experts nominated to examine United Kingdom proposals on beef. [37487]

Mrs. Browning: The Government have no reason to question the independence of the members of the various EU expert scientific committees on BSE.

Isle of Wight (Coastal Erosion)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what studies his Department has evaluated in respect of ways of stabilising the cliff erosion alongside the military road on the Isle of Wight; [36029]

(2) what representations he has received from the Isle of Wight council about funding coastal protection works to preserve the military road between Freshwater and Brightstone. [36027]

Mr. Boswell: It is the responsibility of the Isle of Wight council, as the coastal protection authority, rather than the Ministry, to commission and evaluate any such studies which they consider to be necessary. At this stage, the Ministry has received no formal representations from the council about funding works to protect the military road. If any works were designed solely to protect a road, funding would be the responsibility of the relevant highway authority and grant aid would not be available from this Department.

Live Domestic Animal Imports

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those countries which currently accept imports from the United Kingdom of live domestic animals. [39704]

Mrs. Browning: So far as we are aware, the following third countries, territories, states and so on, are willing to accept cats and dogs exported from Great Britain, subject to certain animal health conditions being met.

Alaska
Anguilla
Antigua and Barbuda
Argentina
Ascunsion Island
Australia
Austria
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belgium
Belize
Bermuda
Bhutan
Bolivia
Borneo
Botswana
Brazil
British Virgin Islands
Brunei
Bulgaria
Burma
Cameroon
Canada
Cayman Islands
Chile
China
Colombia
Commonwealth of Dominica
Costa Rica
Cote d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Denmark
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Estonia
Ethiopia
Falkland Islands
The Faroe Islands
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
Fiji
Finland
France
The Gambia
Germany
Ghana
Gibraltar
Greece
Grenada
Guatemala
Guyana
Hawaii
Honduras
Hong Kong
Hungary
Iceland
India
Indonesia
Iran
Iraq
Irish Republic
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Republic of Korea
Kuwait
Laos
Latvia
Lebanon
Lesotho
Liberia
Libya
Lithuania
Luxembourg
Madagascar
Malawi
Malaysia
Malta
Mauritius
Mexico
Montserrat
Morocco
Mozambique
Namibia
Netherlands
New Caledonia
New Zealand
Nigeria
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Panama
Papua New Guinea
Paraguay
Peru
Phillipines
Poland
Portugal
Puerto Rico
Qatar
Reunion
Romania
Russian Federation
Saudi Arabia
Seychelles
Sierra Leone

Singapore
Slovakia
Slovenia
Solomon Islands
South Africa
Spain (including the Canary and Balearic Islands)
Sri Lanka
St. Helena
St. Kitts and Nevis
St. Lucia
St. Vincent and The Grenadines
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Syria
Tahiti
Taiwan
Tanzania
Thailand
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Turks and Caicos Islands
Uganda
Ukraine
United Arab Emirates
United States
Uruguay
Uzbekistan
Vanuatu
Venezuela
Wallace and Futuna Islands
Yemen
Zaire
Zambia
Zimbabwe.

Beef Ban

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will hold discussions with the European Agriculture Commissioner and at the Council of Ministers to ensure that the restrictions that apply in Britain to abattoirs and rendering plants to ban the use of specified bovine offal and to ban the use of meat and bone meal in animal feeding are also applied in European countries. [39839]

Mrs. Browning: The European Commission has already produced proposals which, if adopted, would introduce a Community-wide ban in animal and human food of:

(a) any material from mammals which had not received ante-mortem inspection;

(b) the skill, vertebral column and spinal cord of cattle, sheep and goats aged over 12 months and the spleen of sheep and goats of any age.

Subject to detailed negotiation on the coverage of the proposal in relation to sheep and goats, the UK is supporting these proposals, which have been referred to the Commission's Scientific Veterinary Committee for further consideration.

As regards the use of meat and bonemeal, there has been a prohibition on the feeding of mammalian protein to ruminants throughout the EU since Commission decision 94/381 of 27 June 1994. There is an exemption for member states which can demonstrate that non-ruminant protein is processed separately from ruminant protein which we believe applies to Denmark which has plants dedicated to processing only porcine material.

Pesticides

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact of climate changes in the United Kingdom on trends in the use of agricultural pesticides. [40070]

Mrs. Browning: There are many uncertainties in terms of the nature, extent and timing of climate change, the consequent changes in prevalence and behaviour of pests, weeds and diseases and the response of farmers to these changes. However, studies support the view that it is unlikely that climate change will lead to rapid change in the pattern or volume of pesticide use.

The Government continue to fund related research. The Government will ensure that the regulation of pesticides continues to protect people and the environment as pesticide usage alters in response to climate change and other developments.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to receive the report from Professor John Krebs on the relationship between tuberculosis in cattle and diseased badgers. [40812]

Mrs. Browning: It is expected that Professor Krebs will report in the early summer of 1997.

Milk Quota Transfers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what level of allowance the Intervention Board sets when *(a)* a lessee and *(b)* a transferee acquires a multi-lot milk quota transfer from the same (i) leasor and (ii) transferor; and if he will make a statement. [40893]

Mr. Baldry: The Intervention Board has informed milk producers, purchasers and quota agents of its intention to round calculations of permanent butterfat percentages in transfers or leases of milk quota to six places of decimal. This change will take effect from 1 April 1997. In the meantime, transfers and leases presented in multi-lotted form, which the board considers will have the effect of achieving a higher butterfat percentage than would have arisen from a single lot movement of the same quantity, will have the individual transactions rounded to six places of decimal at each stage and the final figure to two places. This measure is necessary to ensure that the butterfat level of the national quota is not distorted in a way which would leave the United Kingdom open to financial correction of its accounts by the European Commission.

Quarantine Regulations

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement regarding the Government's current policy towards quarantine regulations. [40898]

Mrs. Browning: The Government's first priority is public health and our current strict quarantine controls have ensured that the UK is rabies free. The Government are determined that should remain the case. The Government recognise that the current restrictions are onerous for some people and agree that they should be replaced if alternatives offering the same protection become available. The Government would, however, never support any change which increased the likelihood of rabies entering the UK.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by his Department in each of the past two years. [40627]

Mr. Boswell: This is a matter of public record.

Milk (Dioxins)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will publish the results of his Department's survey of dioxins in milk in the vicinity of Hampshire incinerators. [40873]

Mrs. Browning: A summary of the results currently available, including dioxins in milk from the vicinity of four incinerators in Hampshire, will be published in this month's issue of the MAFF/Department of Health *food Safety–Information Bulletin*.

Forestry Commission Land

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the plots of Forestry Commission land in South Yorkshire which are *(a)* currently for sale and *(b)* being considered for sale; and in each case (i) what is the size of the plot, (ii) what consultation is planned in advance of the sale and (iii) how many representations he has received to date for and against the proposed sale; [40904]

(2) if he will list the plots of land which have been sold by the Forestry Commission in South Yorkshire in each of the last five years; and in each case *(a)* what was the size of the plot, *(b)* what consultation was made in advance of the sale and *(c)* how many representations he received (i) for and (ii) against the sale. [40905]

Mr. Boswell: The subjects of the questions relate to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. Gordon Cowie, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Gordon M. Cowie to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 16 October 1996:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your Questions about Forestry Commission land in South Yorkshire.

In answer to your questions I enclose the following information:—

Annex A—a list of land sold since 1991

Annex B—a list of land currently for sale, either on the Open Market or by Negotiation, or currently being considered for sale.

All the properties listed were notified in the Estates Gazette, added to which the local authority have been advised of our intention to sell.

For Annex A, we have no detailed records of any representations.

For Annex B, there has only been one representation received to-date, and that is against the sale of Owston & Duck Holt Woods and Wadworth Woods. The matter is being dealt with separately via Ministerial Correspondence between yourself and the Rt Hon. John Gummer MP which has since been redirected to the Scottish Office to be replied to in due course.

Annex A: Forestry Commission cases sold in South Yorkshire from 1991 to date

Year	*Name of property*	*Area (ha)*
1991	Bagger Wood (pt)	0.1
	Broom Royd	8.3
	Crane Moor Wood	1.0
	Top Pit Wood	5.6
1992	Bagger Wood	26.8
	Lower Lee Wood	5.0
	Melton Wood	100.5
	Upper Lee Wood	2.7
1993	Bawtry Woods	214.0
	Stockbridge By-Pass	2.8
1994	Black Carr	20.4
	Cannon Hall Estate	160.4
1995	No sales	—
1996	No sales	—

Annex B: Forestry Commission land currently for sale either on the open market or by negotiation in South Yorkshire

Year	*Name of property*	*Area (ha)*
1996	Owston and Duck Holt Woods	64.0
	Wadworth Woods	115.0
	Green Springs Wood	12.0
	Old Park Wood	41.0
	Walker Wood	6.0
	Hugset Wood	34.0
	Millerhill/Wigfield Wood	5.0

Forestry Commission land currently being considered for sale in South Yorkshire

There are no cases being considered at present.

Thirty-month Scheme

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to reduce the backlog of cull cattle under the 30-month scheme in Dorset. [41217]

Mr. Baldry: A telephone survey of producers carried out by my Department and those in Wales and Northern Ireland revealed a much larger backlog of animals awaiting entry to the 30-month scheme than we had previously estimated. It also showed that some areas, including the south-west of England, were much more seriously affected than others. The Intervention Board is taking urgent steps to increase the weekly slaughter from a level at the end of August of about 23,000 animals a

week to 55,000 as quickly as possible. A new rendering mix will allow more animals to be slaughtered for a given amount of rendering capacity by consigning more material to cold store. More cold storage space is being contracted and the renderers are making significantly greater capacity available from next week. About 42,000 animals are expected to be slaughtered this week and the number is planned to increase to more than 50,000 next week. In increasing abattoir allocations, the Intervention Board is giving priority to those serving markets and producers in the particularly disadvantaged areas including those in Dorset.

Buildings and Premises (Expenditure)

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by his Department and its agencies; and if he will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41152]

Mr. Boswell: The information is as follows:

New buildings and premises (including specialised buildings)

	£
1991–92	25,042,934
1992–93	20,303,048
1993–94	27,631,496
1994–95	42,176,564
1995–96	49,969,517

New office space

	sq.ft.
1991–92	17,190.10
1992–93	1,199.74
1993–94	10,579.35
1994–95	6,528.73
1995–96	18,445.76

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to impose a reciprocal ban on the import of beef from any country that bans the import of British beef until such time as that country's Government can satisfy him that its cattle herds are entirely free of BSE. [23148]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 28 March 1996]:* I very much regret that my hon. Friend has had to wait so long for a reply.

Member states of the EU have power to take interim protective measures under article 9 of Council directive 89/662/EEC pending the adoption of EU legislation where there is an outbreak of disease in the territory of another member state.

The United Kingdom has asked the Commission to adopt Community-wide controls on the removal of specified bovine offal from cattle carcasses.

All fresh meat imported into the UK, whether from other member states or third countries, must have been produced in accordance with harmonised Community rules laid down in Council directive 64/433/EEC. In addition, the Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) Regulations 1996 prohibit the sale for human consumption of all bovine meat derived from bovines which, at the time of slaughter, were more than 30 months old. This measure applies to all bovines slaughtered on or after 29 March 1996, whether in the UK or overseas, other than those born, reared and slaughtered in those third countries listed in the schedule to those regulations, and those aged between 30 and 42 months from herds registered under the beef assurance scheme. The list of countries is confined to those where the Government are satisfied we can import beef without risk.

The imposition by the UK of any unreasonable barriers to trade would be contrary to our World Trade Organisation commitments. It would not therefore be appropriate for us to take retaliatory action in respect of those countries which have imposed a ban on exports of beef from the UK in advance of the general prohibition on exports introduced under Commission decision 96/239/EC of 27 March.

Driftnets

Mr. Olner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he intends to review the current maximum lengths of driftnets in respect of the finding of the recent report, cetacean by-catch in the UK tuna driftnets fishery 1995; and what proposals he has to ban the use of driftnets; [24842]

(2) what response he has made to the proposals for a ban on the use of driftnets from the European Parliament and the European Commission; and if he will make it his policy to support an EU-imposed ban on driftnetting; [24580]

(3) what assessment he has made of the scientific evidence for a ban on high seas driftnets. [24581]

Mr. Baldry *[pursuant to his reply, 16 April 1996, c. 464-65]:* The current maximum length of driftnets permitted on UK and other Community fishing vessels is set at 2.5 km in line with the precautionary approach and in response to United Nations resolutions. I am not aware of scientific evidence that justifies a different maximum length or a ban on the use of drift nets. I do not therefore support the European Commission's proposal but I do think that means should be sought to reduce by-catches of cetaceans in high seas driftnet fisheries.

Live Sheep Traders (Ireland)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current position in respect of the case brought by MAFF against Live Sheep Traders (Ireland); and what arrangements have been made by Mr. Roger Ernest Mills to pay the damages awarded to MAFF. [28438]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 7 May 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) on 15 February 1996, *Official Report*, column 675.

Animal Feed

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what regulatory monitoring there is in place to check on the antibiotic content of farm animal feed and its possible cumulative effect on the human consumer. [30724]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* The use of additives in animal feedingstuffs is subject to directive 70/524/EEC, as amended. No feed additive may be authorised unless it satisfies criteria set out in the directive, including a requirement that, at the level permitted in feedstuffs, it does not adversely affect human or animal health or the environment.

Surveillance for the use of residues of veterinary medicines including antibiotics in food producing animals is carried out under the national surveillance scheme for residues in meat, which implements EC Directive 86/469. About 40,000 samples are collected in GB each year from randomly selected slaughterhouses by the Meat Hygiene Service and tested for the presence of these substances.

The results show that the incidence of residues found in 1995 was very low. Only 99 samples out of some 47,000 tested were above the action level. Because of the considerable margins of safety involved, none of these samples was likely to have posed a health risk to consumers. The results of this surveillance are published in the Veterinary Medicines Directorate's annual report on surveillance for veterinary residues and updated quarterly in its Medicines Act veterinary information newsletter, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

European Movement

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what grants his Department made to the European Movement in each year since 1985 to 1996; and what plans he has to offer financial assistance in future years. [40080]

Mr. Page: The Department of Trade and Industry made a grant of £40,000 in 1989 towards an education campaign on the single market. A further £32,000 was granted in 1990 and approximately £20,000 in 1991.

The Department has no plans to offer financial assistance to the European Movement in future years.

Radio Spectrum

Mr. Timms: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress his Department has made in increasing co-operation with Europe over the management and distribution of the radio spectrum. [40316]

Mr. Ian Taylor: My Department continues to participate actively in all areas of European radio spectrum management in order to provide the maximum opportunities and benefits for UK manufacturers, operators and users through, in particular, the harmonisation of European radio usage. My officials have led in many European developments including the formation of the European Radiocommunications Committee of CEPT, the Conference of European Posts and Telecommunications administrations, and in the current discussions on the future management of the radio spectrum arising from our White Paper, Cm 3252, published last June.

Additionally, on 27 September, the EU Telecommunications Council reached political agreement on a proposed decision to facilitate the introduction of satellite personal communications services. The appropriate framework is to be developed by CEPT.

Internet (Ethical Issues)

Mr. Timms: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the final report of the Government's study into ethical issues and the Internet will be published and placed in the Library. [40344]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The CCTA work on ethical issues and the Internet provides an input to the relevant Departments as they take forward their various responsibilities in this area. The CCTA itself has no policy responsibility in this field.

The work will not be made more widely available, because it does not reflect a full account of the Government's policies in this area and was a contribution to advice to Ministers. The Government's considered views on the subject were set out in my speech to the Internet Services Providers Association on May 21, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. In support of these policies, we have worked with the Internet industry, the Home Office and the police, towards the agreement of industry proposals—"R^3 Safety-Net"—to combat the problems of illegal material on the Internet. Copies of the industry proposals were distributed to the Trade and Industry Select Committee, and I have also deposited copies in the Library of the House.

British Energy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many shares in British Energy are held by Her Majesty's Government following privatisation. [40501]

Mr. Page: Approximately 85.9 million shares in British Energy plc are presently held by the Government.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the factors underlying the decision not to sell 12.3 per cent. of British Energy shares during the privatisation of the company. [40503]

Mr. Page: In line with previous privatisations, and as set out in detail in the British Energy share offer prospectus, up to 90 million shares in British Energy plc were retained by the Secretary of State at the time of the offer to cover the over-allotment option granted to BZW. Following settlement of that option on 13 August, the Secretary of State retained approximately 85.9 million shares, of which approximately 5 million represent shares retained to satisfy potential entitlements to bonus shares under the UK public offer.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage and cash value of the shares in British Energy remain held on behalf of the Government; and if he will make a statement. [40709]

Mr. Page: Up to 90 million shares were retained at the time of the share offer to cover the over-allotment option granted to BZW. Following settlement of that option on 13 August, the Secretary of State retained approximately 85.9 million shares, of which approximately 5 million

shares are retained to cover potential entitlements to bonus shares under the UK public offer. The shares retained by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on behalf of the Government represent approximately 12⅓ per cent. of the total shares.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had, or his officials have had, regarding *(a)* reviewing the contributions made by British Energy to the segregated fund and *(b)* assessing British Energy's ability to meet its operational liabilities; and what staff and mechanisms are to be deployed to monitor *(a)* and *(b)* above. [40727]

Mr. Page: British Energy's contributions to the segregated fund are determined by British Energy and the Nuclear Generation Decommissioning Fund Ltd., owned by the trustees of an independent trust, under the terms of the contractual arrangements between them. It is for British Energy to deal with its operational liabilities.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the total sum raised for the Exchequer by the sale of British Energy to date; and what further moneys are forecasted. [40721]

Mr. Page: Proceeds from the British Energy Share Offer to date have been £630 million from the first instalment paid for the shares sold and £60 million of debt repayment. A further £100 million of debt is expected to be repayed later in this financial year. In the financial year 1997–98, it is anticipated that the proceeds from payment of the second instalment on the shares sold will be £590 million. British Energy will continue to have a debt to the Government, in the form of bonds to the value of £440 million, and the Government hold shares in British Energy which have a value of about £183 million at the issue price. In addition, liabilities of £3.7 billion have been transferred to the private sector.

Fissile Materials (Verification)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to part 2(3) of his Department's management information system for Ministers—MINIS—return, what proposals he has to ensure that the verification regime established for the fissile materials cut-off convention is proportionate to the security gains and that the United Kingdom contribution to the costs is not disproportionate. [40508]

Mr. Nelson: We are preparing for prospective negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. A ban on the future production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices would be a significant contribution to non-proliferation and international security, provided that it enjoyed wide support from countries including those which have not yet signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. The nature and scope of the proposed FMCT and its associated verification regime have still to be negotiated.

National Grid

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of trade what assessment he has made of the effect on safety of the national grids of the implementation of the recommendation by the electricity regulator made on 13 August, in respect of reduction in transmission costs charged by the National Grid. [40502]

Mr. Page: The Director General of Electricity Supply issued his fourth consultation document of the review of transmission price controls on 13 August. On 3 October he issued his final proposals which included some modifications. The Director General of Electricity Supply, in making his final proposals, was required to have regard to his statutory duties. These include, among other duties, exercising his functions in a way best calculated to protect the public from dangers arising from the transmission of electricity, and to secure that National Grid is able to finance the carrying on of its licensed activities. The National Grid is required to operate its transmission system in accordance with regulations relating to safety which are made under part 1 of the Electricity Act 1989.

Trade Mission (China)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who accompanied him on his recent trade mission to China; what cities were visited; what was the outcome of the visit; and if he will make a statement. [40453]

Mr. Nelson: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade visited Dalian and Beijing during his recent visit to China. In Dalian he promoted the opportunities for British business there and in particular, supported the close links between Dalian and the city of Glasgow with which it is twinned. In Dalian, my right hon. Friend was accompanied by: the Lord Provost and representatives of Glasgow city council; Bass International Brewers; China Britain Trade Group (Scotland); Commercial Union Assurance Co. plc; GEC Alsthom; Ian Dickson Travel Service; Koo and Partners; Lawrence Graham; Prudential Corporation Asia Ltd.; Robert Flemming and Co. Ltd.; Robert Gordon University; Royal and Sun Alliance Group plc; Siemens Traffic Controls; Silleck Mouldings (Scotland) Ltd.; Standard Chartered Bank; and Strachan and Henshaw.

In Beijing, my right hon. Friend's discussions with senior Chinese leaders continued the series of high-level bilateral exchanges which have promoted closer two way business relations. He was accompanied in Beijing by senior representatives from: British Petroleum Co. plc.; Commercial Union Assurance Plc; Eagle Star Asia; General Accident plc; Kvaerner Corporate Development Ltd; Lucas Braking Systems; Prudential Corporation Asia Ltd.; Robert Fleming and Co. Ltd.; Rolls Royce plc; Royal and Sun Alliance Insurance Group Plc; Shell Transport and Trading Co.; Standard Chartered Bank; Varity Perkins; and Zeneca China Ltd.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations his Departments held about the business visit to China by Prince Michael of Kent in September; what was the nature of this visit; how its related to the trade mission which he led to China; and if he will make a statement. [40454]

Mr. Nelson: The Department of Trade and Industry was not involved in the arrangements for Prince Michael of Kent's visit to China in September. This was a business trip by private companies, unrelated to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade's official visit to China in the same month.

Nuclear Reprocessing

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which countries with which British Nuclear Fuels

has reprocessing contracts have agreed to accept the return of reprocessing waste using the substitution formula developed since 2 May 1986. [40778]

Mr. Page: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 20 February 1995, *Official Report*, columns *34–35*.

Nuclear Energy

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the reasons for, and the amounts of, increased spending on back-end fuel costs in years 1994–95 and 1995–96 by Nuclear Electric and British Nuclear Fuels. [40724]

Mr. Page: Increased spending by Nuclear Electric on back-end fuel costs in 1994–95 and 1995–96 included partial payments of outstanding moneys due to BNFL from the period between 1989 when contract negotiations began until 1995, when fixed price contracts between Nuclear Electric and BNFL were finalised. The exact value of these payments is a commercial matter for the companies concerned.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the difference in the discounted advanced gas-cooled reactor and pressurised water reactor liabilities between the figures announced in *(a)* February and *(b)* British Energy's prospectus. [40722]

Mr. Page: The difference between the figures for discounted AGR and PWR liabilities discussed in February in, for example, submissions to the Trade and Industry Committee and the figures published in the prospectus is mainly attributable to the change in the discount rate from 2 per cent. to 3 per cent.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on current Government policy on the time scale for decommissioning and dismantling nuclear power stations. [40725]

Mr. Page: Government policy on the decommissioning of nuclear power stations is set out in paragraphs 124 to 127 of last year's final conclusions of the "Review of Radioactive Waste Management Policy", Cm 2919, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the result of the nuclear installations inspectorate investigations into the cause of spent fuel damage in advanced gas-cooled reactors at *(a)* Hunterston, *(b)* Hinkley Point, *(c)* Torness, *(d)* Heysham (i) 1 and (ii) 2 and *(e)* Hartlepool; and if he will make a statement. [41035]

Mr. Page: I understand that Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear are currently carrying out an investigation into the causes and implications of a small amount of unexpected wear to the external ribbing of some fuel pins recently discharged from some AGR nuclear power stations. The Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate, which is closely monitoring this investigation, is satisfied that the unexpected wear raises no immediate safety concerns and that the installations can continue to operate.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the arrangements for payment of the AGR reprocessing costs. [40838]

Mr. Page: This is a commercial matter between British Energy and BNFL.

Magnox

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the increase in the undiscounted Magnox liabilities between the figures given in evidence to the Trade and Industry Select Committee and the figure accepted in Magnox's recent report and accounts. [40723]

Mr. Page: The figures for nuclear liabilities published by the Trade and Industry Committee were for the year ending 31 March 1995. The detailed movements in Magnox Electric's undiscounted liabilities in the year ending 31 March 1996 are set out in the table on page 6 of Magnox Electric's report and accounts for that year. The main changes concerned recognition of inflation and the acquisition of Hunterston A.

Inward Investment

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what have been the 10 inward investment decisions of most financial value since January 1993; which companies were concerned; where the inward investment is to be made; and what is its value. [40762]

Mr. Greg Knight: According to figures notified to my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau, since January 1993, the 10 inward investment decisions of most financial value are as follows:

	Year	*Company*	*Country*	*£'s*	*Investment to be made*
1	1996	Hyundai	Korea	2.4 billion	Scotland
2	1996	LG	Korea	1.7 billion	Wales
3	1995	Siemens	Germany	1.1 billion	North-east
4	1995	Fujitsu	Japan	816 million	North-east
5	1994	Toyota	Japan	800 million	East Midlands
6	1996	UPS	USA	£784 million	East Midlands
7	1994	NEC	Japan	£530 million	Scotland
8	1994	Samsung	Korea	£450 million	North-east
9	1995	Jaguar	USA	£370 million	West Midlands
10	1994	Newport Wafer FAB	Hong Kong	£340 million	Wales

Regional Services

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to transfer the responsibility for designing and delivering regional services currently provided by Government Departments or regional offices to business-led partnerships between training and enterprise councils and business links. [40756]

Mr. Page: The Government's new approach to support for business, including the delegation of design and delivery of such support to business-led partnerships at local and sectoral level, was set out in the replies given yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) and my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson).

Social Chapter

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many copies of "The Social Chapter-British and Continental Approaches" have been printed; and what is the total cost including research, printing and distribution. [40761]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Forty thousand copies of the booklet have been printed. It is planned that a smaller number of copies will be produced in French, German, Italian and Spanish for distribution in other EU member states.

The text was prepared internally, so no external costs for research were incurred. It is not possible to quantify the staff time involved. The final cost of design, printing and distribution is expected to be in the region of £25,000.

Porterbook Leasing

Mr. Dykes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what conclusions he has reached in his discussions with *(a)* the Rail Regulator and *(b)* the Department of Trade and Industry in respect of a referral of the proposed takeover of Porterbook Leasing plc by the Stagecoach Group plc and its subsidiaries. [40990]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is considering the advice received from the Director General of Fair Trading on this takeover under the merger provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973. He will announce his decisions in due course on whether or not to refer it to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Promotional Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much his Department has spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotion and *(c)* hospitality in each of the last six years. [40611]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Expenditure on publicity and promotions from centrally managed budgets and hospitality has been as follows:

£000

	Publicity and promotions	*Hospitality*
1990–91	15,869	[1]392
1991–92	10,203	535
1992–93	9,923	548
1993–94	8,468	690
1994–95	8,112	712
1995–96	9,211	[2]670

[1] Information not readily available for Companies House prior to October 1991.

[2] Work previously carried out by the Accounts Services Agency and National Physical Laboratory was contracted out on 1 April and 1 October 1995 respectively. The National Engineering Laboratory and Laboratory of the Government Chemist were privatised on 31 October 1995 and 31 March 1996 respectively. Information for the National Engineering Laboratory and the Laboratory of the Government Chemist is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many answers to *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by his Department in each of the past two years. [40642]

Mr. John M. Taylor: This is a matter of public record.

Steel Industry

Mr. Hardy: to ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he is taking to ensure that the British steel industry does not face unfair competition within the European Union; and what steps are being taken in regard to subsidies of production by *(a)* national and *(b)* regional governments in Belgium. [40074]

Mr. Greg Knight: The Government have made their opposition to illegal subsidies to EU steel producers very clear to both the Commission and other member states. The UK Steel Subsidies Monitoring Committee has also played a part in maintaining the pressure to end these subsidies. Following a complaint from the UK and others, the Commission recently opened an investigation into the state aid element of the Forges de Clabecq rescue package. If a British company is able to provide evidence of illegal subsidies to other steel producers, we will pursue the matter vigorously with the Commission.

Pay Rates

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he is taking to persuade employers to increase rates of pay. [40145]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Pay is a matter to be resolved by the employer and employees concerned in light of local circumstances, without Government intervention. The Government's role is to create the conditions for a growing economy and to remove barriers to employment. Our policy of keeping inflation and interest rates at low levels is aimed at securing an improved standard of living for all. Since 1979, pay at all levels has increased in real terms.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish industrial tribunal statistics for 1994–95, indicating which proportion of applications to industrial tribunals come from companies which employ fewer than 24 people, broken down by jurisdiction in the same format as those made available for 1993–94. [41129]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Industrial tribunal statistics for 1994–95, in the same format as those previously made available for 1993–94, were published in the July 1996 issue of "Labour Market Trends". The industrial tribunals do not collect information on the number of people employed by companies involved in cases before them.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what statistical evidence was supplied by his Department to the deregulation task force on industrial tribunal cases for their 1995–96 report; and if he will publish this evidence. [41130]

Mr. Taylor: The information on industrial tribunal performance and work load supplied to the deregulation task force was that published in departmental reports, the

Green Paper "Resolving Employment Rights Disputes: Options for Reform" and "Labour Market Trends". In addition, in the first three months of this year the tribunals have met their main performance target of bringing 80 per cent. of cases to a first hearing within 26 weeks of the date of registration.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the advantage of the proposal made by the Trades Union Congress in the consultation on the draft Employment Rights (Dispute Resolution) Bill to allow directions hearings on test cases where there are multiple applications to industrial tribunals. [41131]

Mr. Taylor: The rules of procedure already allow the tribunal judiciary to hold directions hearings on test cases in multiple applications. However, I shall consult both presidents of the industrial tribunals about the TUC proposals to see whether any changes in the rules are appropriate.

Lead Imports

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the amount of lead imported into the United Kingdom in each of the last five years. [41124]

Mr. Page: The information is published by HM Customs and Excise in "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom", which is available in the Library of the House.

Laboratory of the Government Chemist

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has anything further to add to the answer given on 2 April, *Official Report*, column *149*, regarding the sale of the Laboratory of the Government Chemist. [41233]

Mr. Ian Taylor: In my reply to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) of 2 April about the completion of the sale of the Laboratory of the Government Chemist, I explained that the consideration—a payment to the Department of £360,000—was to be adjusted in the light of the level of net current assets at completion. The closing accounts for LGC in its last year as an executive agency of the Department have been laid before Parliament today. The adjustment to the sale consideration will be £729,000, resulting in a net payment by the Department to the purchaser of £369,000.

The payment arises principally because LGC's trading performance was not as good as expected and because the Department benefited from advance receipts for work which LGC would have to undertake after the sale. The payment by the Department takes account of LGC's purchase of employee debts. The fact that the sale of LGC represented value for money is not affected by this payment because changes to the level of net current assets and the purchase of employee debts have an equal impact on the benchmark.

Allied Medicare Ltd.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his current estimate of the publication date of the investigation into Allied Medicare Ltd.'s discharge of its functions as a registered employment agency, pursuant to the Huw Evans case. [40752]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information obtained by my Department during its investigation under the Employment Agencies Act 1973 into the supply of Mr. Huw Evans as a nursing auxiliary by Allied Medicare Ltd. cannot be disclosed without the consent of the persons concerned in consequence of section 9(4)(a) of the Act. A copy of my letter of 15 October 1996 to the hon. Gentleman about this matter is being placed in the Library of the House. The licensing of agencies under the Employment Agencies Act 1973 ceased on 3 January 1995. Agencies supplying registered nurses and certain other persons continue to be licensed by local authorities under the Nurses Agency Act 1957.

Import and Export Control Act 1990

Ms Quin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his Department's current policy towards the replacement of the Import and Export Control Act 1990. [41072]

Mr. Nelson: The consultation document, "Strategic Export Controls", Cm 3349, presented to Parliament in July 1996 sought views on whether there should be new primary export control legislation. When responses to that document have been fully considered, I shall inform Parliament of my conclusions.

Internet

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's estimate of the number of households in the UK connected to the Internet. [40938]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Six hundred and seventy-six thousand. This is an 87 per cent. increase on the 1995 figure, 362,000.

British Coal Land

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions he has had with the chairman of British Coal about the transfer of land to English Partnerships; if he will list the sites involved; if he will account for delays in the transfer of this land; and when he estimates the transfer will be concluded. [40764]

Mr. Page: The disposal of British Coal property is a matter for the corporation. My Department maintains regular contact with British Coal as discussions on this matter continue.

British Coal Enterprise

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what sums were received in respect to the *(a)* loan, *(b)* training and *(c)* workshop elements of British Coal Enterprise. [40430]

Mr. Page: The sale of British Coal Enterprise is a matter for British Coal. I understand that the corporation has not yet completed the sale of all of the activities of BCE.

Atolls (Radioactivity)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade pursuant to his answer of 2 May, *Official Report,* column *601,* if he will make a statement on the work of the task groups and the working groups established by the International Atomic Energy Authority to assess the radiological situation of the atolls of Iluvovou and Fangataufa. [40379]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* In a report to the recent International Atomic Energy Agency general conference, the secretariat of the agency gave details to member states of the progress made so far in the study of the radiological situation at the atolls of Mururoa and Fangataufa. I have instructed that a copy of this report be placed in the Libraries of the House.

The report gives details of the participation of United Kingdom experts mentioned in my answer of 3 April to the hon. Member, *Official Report, columns* 309–10.

The report of the international advisory committee is expected in early 1998.

Sellafield

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from the United States Government in respect of making use of spare production capacity at the mixed oxide plutonium fuel production plant at Sellafield for the recycling of plutonium form dismantled nuclear warheads; and what new authorisations would be required for such recycling. [40445]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* None. It is not possible to comment in detail on what authorisations might be necessary were any such contacts to be contemplated. However, British Nuclear Fuels did wish to conclude a contract for the fabrication of MOX fuel from weapons grade plutonium, then an appropriate revision to the Sellafield site safety case would be required, and would need to be agreed with the regulator, the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the implications for the DRAWMOPS—decommissioning and waste management operational programmes—arrangements for nuclear waste management of the proposals for privatisation of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. [40513]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* The separation of the science and engineering services business, AEA-Technology, from UKAEA and its subsequent privatisation has no implications for DRAWMOPS nuclear waste management arrangements. DRAWMOPS will remain under the direct control of the UKAEA. There are no plans to privatise the residual UKAEA.

Cambertown Ltd.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the nature of the arrangement his Department has with Cambertown Ltd. concerning the distribution of letters to hon. Members; what is the cost of the contract; and if he will make a statement. [40680]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department makes arrangements from time to time with a number of companies, including Cambertown Ltd. for the storage and distribution of specific Government publications. The detailed costs of these arrangements are commercially confidential.

Hon. Members are sometimes included in the distribution of such publications, but there is no separate arrangement for this.

Departmental Staff (Energy Matters)

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many staff in his Department spend 50 per cent. or more of their time on energy-related matters; and how many of them work on press and publicity and public relations. [41288]

Mr. Page: Within the Department I estimate that there are 412 staff spending 50 per cent. or more of their time on energy-related matters, including those staff employed in the oil and gas projects and supplies office. Six of these staff work on publicity, press and other media relations activity.

Coal Stockpiles

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what tonnages of stockpiled coal are currently held by power generators in England, Scotland and Wales; and what assessment he has made of the likelihood of their meeting demand over the next six months. [41290]

Mr. Page: Latest available data are for the end of July 1996 when electricity generators in the United Kingdom held 7.7 million tonnes of coal in stock. Separate figures for England, Scotland, and Wales are not available.

I expect stocks to be adequate to maintain generation at coal-fired stations over the next six months.

Link Programmes

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what priorities to improve competitiveness have been revealed since March 1995 as a result of the link programmes on *(a)* genetic and environmental interactions in health, *(b)* waste minimisation through recycling, reuse and recovery in industry, *(c)* competitive industrial materials from non-food crops, *(d)* sustainable livestock production and *(e)* integrated approaches to healthy aging. [41226]

Mr. Ian Taylor: These programmes are all addressing priorities identified by technology foresight panels. However, collaborative research projects funded through these programmes are only just beginning. These and subsequent projects will provide for research partnerships between companies and the science and engineering base, lasting several years. Based on experience from earlier Link programmes, they can be expected to take forward the development of new technology in high priority areas.

There are currently 15 Link programmes addressing foresight priorities and there has been extensive dissemination of information about each programme, with

encouragement given to industry—including to small and medium-sized companies—to develop research partnerships with academic institutions, across a range of sectors.

Companies which become involved in the programmes the hon. Gentleman mentions can be expected to improve their competitiveness by exploiting the outcomes of their collaborative research projects in a range of markets.

New Buildings and Premises

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by his Department and its agencies; and if he will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41149]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Within my Department, management of property is delegated to a series of property centres to maximise synergy with business operation. The DTI headquarters property centre has acquired only one new building over the past five years. To replace premises on which the lease had expired, we acquired in March 1995 about the same amount of new space—20,094 sq.ft.—at a total annual cost of £461,000.

I have asked the chief executives of the DTI's executive agencies to respond direct to the hon. Member.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what capacity of electricity used in his Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans he has to increase that capacity. [41313]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Nil. My Department keeps under review the opportunities for using combined heat and power, but currently there are no firm plans to install such a system in our buildings.

Dowdon and Fox Cover Enterprise Zones

Mr. Cummings: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on progress made in the transfer of Dowdon and Fox Cover enterprise zones to English Partnerships. [41223]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

I hope that an announcement can be made shortly.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41188]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Butte Mining and Plateau Mining

Mr. Byers: To ask the Attorney-General (1) on what dates since January 1990 the Serious Fraud Office sent letters to the Department of Trade and Industry concerning the activities of *(a)* Butte Mining and *(b)* Plateau Mining; [40757]

(2) at what date the Serious Fraud Office began its investigation into *(a)* Butte Mining and *(b)* Plateau Mining; when the investigations were completed; what action was subsequently taken; and if he will make a statement. [40758]

The Attorney-General: The Serious Fraud Office commenced investigation into the affairs of Richmond Oil and Gas plc on 29 June 1992. Matters emerging during that investigation caused the Serious Fraud Office to begin an investigation into Butte Mining plc on 9 September 1993. Between May 1995 and March 1996 four people were charged with conspiracies to defraud and the case is awaiting trial before the central criminal court.

During the course of its investigations, the Serious Fraud Office liaises as necessary with the Department of Trade and Industry. It is my practice not to give details of steps taken in the course of individual criminal investigations.

The Serious Fraud Office has not conducted an investigation into the affairs of Plateau Mining.

Promotional Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Attorney-General how much his Department has spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotion and *(c)* hospitality in each of the last six years. [40617]

The Attorney-General: The amounts spent on publicity, promotion and hospitality in the departments and agencies for which I am responsible are set out in the following tables. Information for the Treasury Solicitor's Department, lawyers management unit and the legal secretariat to the Law Officers for financial years before 1993–94 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. It is not possible to distinguish between expenditure on publicity and promotion.

Publicity and promotion

	1990–91 £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £
Department			
Crown Prosecution Service	138,284	221,502	238,559
Serious Fraud Office	1,072	3,150	—

	1993–94 £	*1994–95* £	*1995–96* £
Department			
Crown Prosecution Service	185,164	199,316	191,498
Serious Fraud Office	4,071	585	3,826
Treasury Solicitor's Department	—	4,671	24,485
Lawyers Management Unit	23,799	27,884	35,483
Government Property Lawyers Agency	24,916	1,543	1,757
Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers	—	—	—

Hospitality

Department	*1990–91* £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £
Crown Prosecution Service	14,693	19,541	20,707
Serious Fraud Office	7,624	2,923	3,686

Department	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £	*1995–96* £
Crown Prosecution Service	11,476	16,678	9,086
Serious Fraud Office	5,039	3,187	5,958
Treasury Solicitor's Department	185	782	244
Lawyers Management Unit	—	126	65
Government Property Lawyers Agency	485	502	496
Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers	3,943	3,127	1,886

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Attorney-General how many *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by his Department in each of the past two years. [40635]

The Attorney-General: This is a matter of public record.

"Barbecue in Rostock"

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General what consideration has been given to prosecuting the band No Remorse, and the producers and distributors of the CD "Barbecue in Rostock"; and if he will make a statement. [41065]

The Attorney-General: I understand that Gwent police are conducting an investigation into the production of a compact disk by a band calling themselves No Remorse during which they have sought legal advice from the Crown Prosecution Service. When the investigation has been completed, it is expected that the police will submit a file of evidence to the Crown Prosecution Service for advice as to whether criminal proceedings should be instituted.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the Attorney-General what capacity of electricity used in his Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans he has to increase that capacity. [41324]

The Solicitor-General: The departments and agencies for which my right hon. and learned Friend is responsible have no electricity generating plant. The question of energy sourcing is kept under review.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorist Organisation (Funding)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many bank accounts have been investigated under anti-terrorist legislation in each of the last five years. [40665]

Sir John Wheeler: It is policy not to comment in detail on these matters. I can, however, assure the hon. Gentleman that the legislation is vigorously applied and used to good effect.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to improve legislation in respect of funding of terrorist organisations. [40664]

Sir John Wheeler: The Proceeds of Crime (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which came into force on 26 August, incorporates, builds upon and extends the terrorist finance provisions which previously existed in the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991 and would have been used to good effect against terrorist racketeers. The order strengthens and improves the measures available to confiscate the proceeds of drug trafficking and other serious crime, much of which is believed to be terrorist linked.

The new powers extend at least as wide as the Emergency Provisions Act terrorist finance investigation and confiscation powers which they replace and are capable of being used to assist in tracing the ill-gotten gains of all racketeers, whether terrorists or not.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the operation of legislation in respect of the funding of terrorist organisations. [40662]

Sir John Wheeler: The Government and the police recognise the importance of illegal finance and in the fight against terrorism a range of measures has been taken to counter it. The police have established specialist resources which have successfully investigated a wide variety of illegal terrorist funding activities including exploitation of social clubs to raise money through fraud and scams, extortion rackets, counterfeiting and tax exemption fraud.

The Government have taken measures to counter terrorist finance in Northern Ireland and these provisions are contained in the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 and the Proceeds of Crime (Northern Ireland) Order 1996.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been charged under funding of terrorist organisations legislation. [40663]

Sir John Wheeler: The number of persons against whom proceedings have commenced for offences contrary to sections 9 to 11 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989, between 1991 and 1995 was 217; but there have been few convictions for contravention of part III of the Act primarily because of the lack of evidence to prove a terrorist link to finance offences. However, the absence of convictions is not a true indicator of the value of the legislative provisions. The existence of the powers deters the terrorists; it causes them unease and it disrupts their activities.

Marches

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he had concerning the re-routing of the marches in the Lower Ormeau road on 9 August and in Derry on 10 September with the local residents and marchers. [40267]

Sir John Wheeler: None. The routing of parades is primarily a matter for the Chief Constable. The RUC met on many occasions with local residents and marchers to discuss individual parades. On occasions, officials also met with these groups. The RUC however, have no records on the dates given of parades at these locations.

Plastic Baton Rounds

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were injured by plastic baton rounds in Derry from 11 to 14 July; and what was the nature of the injuries. [40268]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Altnegelion Hospital (Incident)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will establish a public inquiry into the events involving the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Altnegelion hospital on 12 July. [40269]

Sir John Wheeler: I have no plans to establish an inquiry, but the House may wish to note that one complaint has arisen out of this incident and is currently under investigation by the RUC.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many answers to *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by his Department in each of the past two years. [40638]

Sir John Wheeler: This is a matter of public record.

Promotional Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much his Department has spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotion, and *(c)* hospitality in each of the last six years. [40613]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested for the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments is listed.

£ thousand

	Publicity and promotion[1,2]	*Hospitality*
1990–91	8,369	728
1991–92	10,604	807
1992–93	9,564	872
1993–94	8,162	921
1994–95	8,397	832
1995–96	10,953	564

[1] To identify separately publicity and promotion costs would incur disproportionate cost.

[2] The Department of Agriculture is excluded as it could provide figures only at disproportionate cost.

TRANSPORT

Rail Franchise

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those rail franchises which have been re-sold since initial privatisation together with their original purchase price and subsequent selling price. [40682]

Mr. Watts: None of the franchises so far sold to the private sector has been re-sold.

Railway Claims Ltd.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the total amounts paid by Railways Claims Ltd. to claimants since its creation; [40692]

(2) how many claims have been received by Railways Claims Ltd., for each year since its creation. [40691]

Mr. Watts: This is a matter for the board of Railway Claims Ltd.

Coastguard

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by coastguard station the number of additional staff provided as a result of the introduction of the 2182 Khz system. [39478]

Mr. Bowis: As a result of the introduction of monitoring the 2182 Khz system by Coastguard, the agency agreed that an additional auxiliary operations room assistant should be made available to assist in maintaining the distress watch at the 10 designated 2,182 stations. This is in addition to the normal 24-hour watchkeeping complements at each rescue centre and is a temporary arrangement pending the introduction of coastguard watchkeeping assistants. At some of these stations it has proved difficult to find the additional auxiliary ORAs from the pool of trained auxiliaries locally, but this has not affected the ability to respond to 2182 Khz distress calls.

Driver Training

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what have been the quarterly totals of new car drivers completing pass plus courses since their introduction; and what percentage of the numbers passing the driving test take such courses. [40444]

Mr. Bowis: Pass plus was launched on 6 February 1995. Up to the end of September, completion certificates have been issued to 18,823 successful participants. This represents about 2 per cent. of successful test candidates. The quarterly figures are:

	Number of certificates issued
1995	
January to March	976
April to June	3,659
July to September	3,149
October to December	2,873

	Number of certificates issued
1996	
January to March	2,817
April to June	2,831
July to September	2,518

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of state for Transport how many answers to *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by his Department in each of the past two years. [40643]

Mr. Bowis: This is a matter of public record.

West Coast Main Line

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 6 March to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), *Official Report,* column *211,* if he will instruct Railtrack to hold details of past speed restrictions centrally. [40908]

Mr. Watts: No.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of speed restrictions currently in operation on the west coast main line, together with the reason for the restriction. [40710]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 6 March, *Official Report,* column *211.* This is an operational matter for Railtrack and any update should be sought from it.

Rail (Highlands)

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will require Railtrack to carry out a comprehensive review of unmanned level crossings and automatic half-barriers in the highland rail network; and if he will make a statement. [40737]

Mr. Watts: No. Level crossing protection is a matter for Railtrack, subject to statutory approval by the Health and Safety Executive on behalf of the Secretary of State.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the level of *(a)* security and *(b)* accuracy of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's computer database. [40432]

Mr. Bowis: The Driver and Licensing Agency has a computer database security policy which meets Government requirements. The controls in place fully recognise the sensitivities of the date held.

The agency meets its targets of between 96 per cent. and 98 per cent. accuracy of data input to the driver and vehicle registers.

The principal cause of inaccuracy in the DVLA databases is the failure of those who change their name or address, or buy or sell vehicles, to notify the agency promptly. New and improved vehicle registration procedures to be introduced in 1997 will require the buyer and seller to notify DVLA at the same time on the same form.

Air Traffic Control

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the likely number of jobs to be created as a result of the establishment of a second air traffic control centre in Scotland. [40695]

Mr. Bowis: The proposed construction of the new Scottish centre and the replacement of the Oceanic flight data processing system, as envisaged in the invitation to tender of autumn 1995, would result in staff levels at Prestwick being maintained at approximately their current levels.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to make an announcement of the future privatisation of the National Air Traffic Service and on the future of the second air traffic control centre in Scotland. [40694]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's reply of 29 November 1995, *Official Report,* columns *783-84,* to the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans). The timetable for privatisation has not yet been decided.

The future of the proposed air traffic control centre in Scotland is the subject of a review by the Civil Aviation Authority and I expect recommendations emerging from the review to be presented to Ministers later this year.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the occasions over the last 12 months when the air traffic control centre covering the United Kingdom has failed, the length of time the system failed and the estimated number of flights affected. [40689]

Mr. Bowis: The air traffic control centres at West Drayton and Prestwick cover the UK flight information regions. Over the last 12 months there have been a total of five failures resulting in delays to aircraft as follows:

Prestwick (Oceanic Data Processing System)

23 August 1996—at 1005 with delays to aircraft peaking at over 2 hours.

12 September 1996— at 1110 with 40 aircraft delayed in excess of 1 hour.

West Drayton (Host Computer System)

6 October 1995—at 0810—flow restrictions introduced.

5 November 1995—at 1221 resulting in 50 minute outbound delays from Heathrow.

25 January 1996—at 1520—flow restrictions imposed.

New En Route Centre

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each contractor currently employed on the NERC project the number of staff involved and the number of hours of overtime worked for each of the last 12 months. [40686]

Mr. Bowis: Lockheed Martin is the prime contractor for the provision of operational software for the new en route centre at Swanwick. It has employed roughly 400 full-time staff on the project throughout the last 12 months. The contract with Lockheed Martin is on a fixed-price basis and no additional overtime costs have therefore been borne by the Civil Aviation Authority.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of overtime hours worked by Civil Aviation Authority or National Air Traffic Services staff involved on the NERC project for each of the last 12 months. [40687]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority to write to the hon. Member.

Roads Programme

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the contractor building the road is liable for damages, should an accident occur on a design, build, finance and operate system financed road as a result of poor construction or design. [40705]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 16 October 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking if the contractor building the road is liable for damages, should an accident occur on a design, build, finance and operate system financed road as a result of poor construction or design.

Design, build, finance and operate contracts for roads place the responsibility for dealing with claims for damages resulting from poor construction or design on the contractor.

Roads Programme

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those road schemes removed from the main roads programme to the long-term programme in the last 12 months. [40698]

Mr. Watts: The review of the roads programme of November 1995, published in the document "Managing the Trunk Road Programme", categorised schemes according to their status. The list of longer-term schemes in that publication has not changed.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the annual cost to his Department of contracts currently let for road building under the design, build, finance and operate system. [40704]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 16 October 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the cost of contracts currently let for road building under the design, build, finance and operate system.

The following figures illustrate the estimated range of annual cost (over a 5 year period), based on the Highways Agency's forecast of traffic volume for the 8 DBFO contracts awarded so far. These figures which are cash price estimates will be influenced by the usage of the DBFO road and the performance of the DBFO Company. The figures below do not include additional but relatively minor future lump sum payments covering for the example archaeological works, which because of their uncertain nature are extremely difficult to estimate.

1996/97: £21n

1997/98: £68m

1998/99: £82m

1999/00: £163m

2000/01: £189m

Motorways

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the expected road life of the existing motorways in the north-west of England; and if he will make a statement. [39959]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Jim Callaghan, dated 15 October 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking about the expected road life of the existing motorway in the North West of England.

Regular inspections and surveys are carried out to determine maintenance needs and timing of the trunk motorway network. The latest assessment of the residual life of the carriageways shows that 7.6 per cent. of the trunk motorway network in the North West, including Cumbria, will within the next four years reach the point where future performance becomes unpredictable and maintenance needs to be considered. The equivalent figure nationally is 12.7 per cent. These figures show that the motorway network is in good structural condition. Roads are generally designed to last for 20 years before they require major maintenance and, at any time, about 20 per cent. of the motorway network could be expected to fall within the above category.

These figures exclude carriageways constructed wholly of concrete for which there is currently no reliable method of measuring residual life.

Railways (Complaints)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those train operating companies that have been subject to enforcement action by the Rail Regulator as a result of complaints received regarding improper advice in relation to ticket sales. [40697]

Mr. Watts: The enforcement of train operators' licence obligations is a matter for the independent Rail Regulator. He has recently completed a public consultation on accurate and impartial retailing and will wish to consider the outcome of that consultation before deciding what enforcement action, if any, is warranted.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many complaints have been received in each of the last 12 months by the Rail Regulator regarding *(a)* the sale of tickets and *(b)* the telephone inquiry service. [40696]

Mr. Watts: The numbers of complaints received by the Rail Regulator regarding *(a)* the sale of tickets and *(b)* the telephone inquiry service are as follows—separate monthly figures are not available prior to 31 March 1996:

Period	*Tickets and fares*	*Telephone enquiry bureau*
Year to 31 March 1996	121	10
April	1	1
May	3	0
June	0	0
July	0	0
August	12	6
September	9	2
October	3	1

Road Traffic Signs

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he is making with the development of proposals for public consultation on options for amending legislation to allow business sponsorship of, and advertising on, road traffic signs. [40828]

Mr. Bowis: I am considering the road safety and environmental implications of including sponsorship information on road traffic signs.

Roads and Rail (Capital Value)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the capital value of *(a)* all motorways, *(b)* the trunk road network and *(c)* the property of Railtrack, together with the percentage of such sums payable annually to HM Treasury. [40798]

Mr. Bowis: The Highways Agency is currently undertaking a valuation of the motorway and trunk road network in England, including associated land and structures for future inclusion in its commercial accounts. Railtrack's annual report and accounts 1995—96 include a total net book value of tangible fixed assets—investment properties, stations, depots, other land and buildings, track, signalling systems, electrification, other infrastructure and plant and machinery—at 31 March 1996 of £4,554 million. No payment is made to HM Treasury specifically in relation to these assets.

Shepherds Bush Flyover

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what report he has received on the recent accident that took place on the Shepherds Bush overhead intersection with the Westway that resulted in a lorry shedding its load on to the travellers, site situated beneath the flyover; and what additional safety precautions he is proposing. [40935]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Clive Soley, dated 16 October 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about an accident on the Shepherds Bush overhead intersection with the Westway.

The accident involved a lorry carrying industrial rolls of paper. The vehicle struck the parapet on an elevated stretch of road. The parapet, which conforms to the Highways Agency's latest standards, successfully restrained the vehicle but unfortunately parts of the load were shed and fell onto the ground below.

It would not be realistic or cost effective to make provisions such that no vehicles or their loads ever left elevated structures after an accident, and so no specific extra precautions are planned in the light of this accident. The Highways Agency is nevertheless committed to delivering a safe trunk road network and if other measures are identified that might improve the safety of this road they will be carefully considered.

Jubilee Line Extension

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of the in-service date of the Jubilee line extension. [40937]

Mr. Bowis: London Transport is aiming to open the Jubilee line extension on 28 March 1998.

Rail Network (Incidents)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of the last 12 months the number of incident reports submitted to the railway inspectorate. [40712]

Mr. Watts: This information is not readily available in the form requested. The total number of reports for the period 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996 is set out in the following table:

	Number
Train incidents	989
Failures of rolling stock and permanent way	1,960
Movement accidents	3,003
Non movement accidents	8,673

These figures will be reproduced in the HM chief inspecting officer of railways' annual report on the safety record of the railways in Great Britain 1995–96, which will be published before the end of the year. A copy will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Rail Network (Unqualified Contractors)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions in the last 12 months reports have been made to the railway inspectorate regarding unqualified contractors found to be working on the rail network. [40711]

Mr. Watts: Instances of unqualified contractors working on the rail network are not reportable under the statutory reporting requirement. From time to time, Health and Safety Executive inspectors receive information or complaints alleging that unqualified contractors are working on the rail network, and these are invariable followed up by HSE's railway inspectorate. However, no central record exists and the information requested could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Rail Freight (Accidents)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of occasions when rolling stock operated by private freight companies has been involved in accidents since rail privatisation. [40690]

Mr. Watts: This information is available in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Bridge Strengthening

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport is he will list for each of the last five years the budget for bridge strengthening. [40684]

Mr. Watts: Each year, the Government provide the Highways Agency with an overall budget for the maintenance of trunk road structures and, through transport supplementary grant and credit approvals, support to local highway authorities in England for the assessment and strengthening of their structures. Details for the last five years are set out in the table. In neither case are funds specifically earmarked for bridge strengthening.

£ million

	Highways agency structures capital maintenance	Local highway authorities assessment and strengthening approved expenditure
1992–93	130	111
1993–94	150	137
1994–95	150	137
1995–96	135	122
1996–97	130	103

Road Re-signing (London)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the decision was taken to cancel the re-signing project in London; what were the reasons; and if ministerial approval was sought. [40699]

Mr. Bowis: It has not been cancelled.

Promotional Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department has spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotion and *(c)* hospitality in each of the last six years. [40612]

Mr. Bowis: The information is as follows:

Publicity

1991–92: £8,270,000

1992–93: £8,730,000

1993–94: £8,275,000

1994–95: £8,039,000

1995–96: £7,525,000

Hospitality

1991–92: £102,000

1992–93: £127,000

1993–94: £220,000

1994–95: £123,000

1995–96: £106,000

(a) Figures are not yet available for the current year.

(b) Publicity includes promotions.

(c) Hospitality includes teas, working lunches and entertainment by both Ministers and officials in the United Kingdom and abroad.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those vehicle registration offices where interviews are unable to be held as part of investigations into vehicle excise duty evasion. [40702]

Mr. Bowis: The information is as follows:

Bangor

Carlisle

Lincoln

Northampton

Portsmouth

Shrewsbury.

Road Fund Tax Fraud

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set up a free phone-in hotline for the reporting of suspected road-fund tax fraudsters; and if he will make a statement. [40831]

Mr. Bowis: I have no plans to do so. To obtain a conviction a court must be satisfied that a vehicle has been used or kept on a public road without a licence. The police, traffic wardens and officials who currently report unlicensed vehicles are best equipped to supply this evidence and to appear in court when required. It is, of course, open to any member of the public to alert the police to a suspected offence.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those structures owned by Railtrack plc that fail to meet the standards for 44 tonne heavy goods vehicles. [40685]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack is currently undertaking a programme to assess the ability of those of its bridges which carry highways to bear 40 tonne lorries from 1999. There is no separate programme to assess the ability of structures to bear 44 tonne vehicles.

Consumer Protection (Channel Ferries)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to ensure that consumers are protected from excessive price rises as a result of the proposed merger between P and O and Stena Sealink on some cross-channel ferry routes. [40681]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

The Director General of Fair Trading is considering the matter and will advise my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade in due course. All representations on this matter should therefore be submitted directly to the DGFT.

Bicycle Lights

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he intends to take to prevent adult cyclists riding their bicycles without the necessary lights after dark. [39958]

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

Enforcement of the law on pedal cycle lighting is an operational matter for individual chief constables. The Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989 require that all bicycles which are used on roads at night must be fitted with a front and rear lamp, which must be kept lit and unobscured, and a rear retro reflector which must be kept unobscured. Fixed penalty notices can be issued to cyclists who fail to comply with these requirements.

The Department of Transport continues to encourage cyclists to comply with the law on pedal cycle lighting through the highway code and the cycle safe publicity campaign.

WALES

Students

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of *(a)* 16, *(b)* 17 and *(c)* 18-year-olds in (i) Wales and (ii) each EU member state are in full-time education or training. [40488]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Information on the participation of 16, 17 and 18-year-olds in education and training for Wales and 11 of the EU member states is presented in the following table. Information given is for full and part-time education and training, as figures for full-time education and training alone are not directly comparable between the countries; 1991–92 is the latest year for which information is available on a consistent basis for these states.

Participation in education and training of 16 to 18-year-olds by age in 1991–92[1]

Percentage

	Age 16	*Age 17*	*Age 18*
Wales	87	77	48
United Kingdom	91	77	52
Belgium	99	97	78
Denmark	92	80	69
Finland	95	86	82
France	92	89	79
Germany, Fed.	96	94	84
Greece	88	62	45
Ireland	89	77	58
Netherlands	98	94	81
Spain	76	67	54
Sweden	90	88	64

Source: Welsh Office, OECD (Education at a Glance, 1995).

[1] Includes apprenticeships and similar schemes such as YT. Also includes an estimate of participation in part-time higher education.

Single Currency

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent assessment he has made of the impact on employment in Wales of preparations made for the single currency and economic and monetary union. [40492]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the oral reply I gave the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) on 19th February 1996, *Official Report*, column 5.

Promotional Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department has spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotion and *(c)* hospitality in each of the last six years. [40610]

Mr. Hague: Welsh Office expenditure on publicity, promotions and hospitality for the last six years is as follows:

£ thousand

	Publicity and promotion[1]	*Hospitality*
1990–91	1,429	45
1991–92	1,957	36
1992–93	1,974	38
1993–94	1,358	27
1994–95	1,725	29
1995–96	1,929	22

[1] Spending is shown at outturn prices and cannot be disaggregated between publicity and promotion.

Buildings (Public Access)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the current level of access to public buildings with particular reference to *(a)* post offices, *(b)* banks and *(c)* building societies in Wales for the physically disabled. [40539]

Mr. Hague: I have seen a copy of Disability Wales's recent report "Access to Financial Premises".

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 will require all service providers, including post offices, banks and building societies, to make reasonable adjustments to their premises, to the way they go about their business and to provide additional help in order to make it easier for disabled people to use their services. The employment rights and the first of the rights of access to goods, facilities and services come into force on 2 December 1996. The remaining rights of access will be phased in following decisions on the consultation exercise carried out earlier this year.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many answers to *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by his Department in each of the past two years. [40644]

Mr. Hague: This is a matter of public record.

Health Authority Budgets

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales who in his Department is responsible for monitoring shortfalls in Welsh health authority budgets; and if he will make a statement. [40749]

Mr. Hague: My officials in the Welsh Office Health Department are responsible for monitoring the financial position of health authorities in Wales. This is undertaken on a monthly basis through a financial information system, and comprises cash as well as income and expenditure monitoring.

Landfill Tax

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements he has made to monitor the implementation of the landfill tax in Wales; and what plans he has to liaise with local authorities over the financial implications for their planning in respect of the liabilities of the landfill waste tax. [40540]

Mr. Hague: Implementation of the tax is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

I discussed the Welsh Local Government Association's assessment of spending needs, including its assessment of landfill tax costs, at a meeting of the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance on 23 September. I will give careful consideration to the assessment in making my 1997–98 local government revenue settlement decisions.

Buildings (Steel Frames)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the value of steel frames for use in the construction of buildings; and what plans he has to promote the marketing of Welsh-manufactured steel frames. [40784]

Mr. Hague: I have made no such assessment. I continue to promote the interests of all Welsh industry at home and overseas.

Skill Shortages

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the major areas of employment where there will be skill shortages over the next five years; and what assessment he has made of the impact of these shortages on manufacturing industry. [41096]

Mr. Hague: The Welsh employers surveys, commissioned regularly by the Welsh Office in partnership with others, produces information on vacancies which are hard to fill because there is a shortage of applicants with the requisite skills. The training and enterprise councils in Wales build on this and other sources of information in making their assessments of the local labour market and skills priorities. "People and Prosperity: an Agenda for Action in Wales" underlined the importance of addressing the skill needs of manufacturing industry and sets out an action plan to meet these.

Agenda 21

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance he has published to support local authorities in their efforts to meet the requirements of Agenda 21 arising out of the Rio treaty. [41161]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Welsh Office has published advice and guidance on various issues relevant to sustainable development and to the involvement of local authorities in undertaking local Agenda 21 processes. Recent examples include "Planning Guidance (Wales): Planning Policy" and "A Working Countryside for Wales", and the Department is shortly to publish its "Environment in Wales", and the Department is shortly to publish its "Environment in Wales", fifth report. The Welsh Office has provided financial support to the Local Government Management Board to assist it in preparing advice to local authorities on local Agenda 21.

New Buildings and Premises

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by his Department and its agencies; and if he will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41151]

Mr. Hague: The Welsh Office estate has been reduced over the last five years from 50 to 23 properties, a reduction of 104,543 sq ft.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the budgeted provision, *(b)* the actual spending, *(c)* the places available, *(d)* the actual places provided and *(e)* the number of schools participating for each year of operation of the assisted places scheme. [41165]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is set out in the following table:

Year	*Provision £*	*Spend £*	*New places available*	*New places taken up*	*Schools in scheme*
1981–82	—[1]	160,783	150	113	9
1983–83	—[1]	274,777	148	113	8
1983–84	—[1]	459,626	129	120	8
1984–85	—[1]	626,876	129	118	8
1985–86	—[1]	842,488	136	115	8
1986–87	—[1]	1,110,805	136	123	8
1987–88	—[1]	1,394,246	136	115	8
1988–89	—[1]	1,435,040	136	126	8
1989–90	—[1]	1,589,392	136	128	8
1990–91	—[1]	1,756,283	136	123	8
1991–92	1,948,000	2,064,813	136	124	8
1992–93	2,392,000	2,457,230	136	131	8
1993–94	2,646,000	2,621,261	136	127	8
1994–95	2,950,000	2,771,504	136	130	8
1995–96	3,097,000	2,904,845	136	124	8
1996–97	3,770,000	—[2]	272	—[2]	14

[1] Figures not readily available
[2] Figures not yet available

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in descending order, for each year the assisted places scheme has been in operation, the fees charged by schools participating in the scheme and the average fee charged each year. [41163]

Mr. Evans: The information requested is not readily available from the start of the scheme. For 1991–92 and subsequent years the fees charged are set out in the following tables:

Average fees per school (age 11+)

School	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Rydal School (Co-ed)	5,436	5,843	5,963	6,095	6,197
Howell's, Denbigh	5,319	5,436	5,556	5,688	5,790
Christ College	5,248	5,364	5,484	5,616	5,718
Penrhos College (Girls)	5,040	5,348	5,467	5,599	5,701
Llandovery College	4,566	4,908	5,028	5,160	5,262
Monmouth Boys	3,998	4,299	4,419	4,551	4,653
Monmouth Girls	3,373	3,627	3,747	3,879	3,981
Howell's, Cardiff	2,967	3,189	3,309	3,441	3,543
Average fee per annum	4,493	4,751	4,872	5,004	5,106

School	*1996–97*
Rydal Penrhos (Co-ed)	6,299
Ruthin School	6,081
Howell's, Denbigh	5,892
Christ College	5,820
Rydal Penrhos (Girls)	5,803
Llandovery College	5,530
Monmouth Boys	4,755
Rougemont School	4,536
Ffynone House School	4,206
Kings Monkton	4,204
Monmouth Girls	4,083
St. John's College	4,009
St. Clare's Convent School	3,702
Howell's, Cardiff	3,645
St. Gerard's School	2,727
Average fee per annum	5,092

Education Statistics

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the number and percentage of pupils in primary school classes of 31 or more in each year since 1986 *(a)* by local education authority and *(b)* for Wales; [41155]

(2) if he will list the number and percentage of teachers who completed training courses in 1994, broken down by subject and in total, who were in posts by March 1995. [41097]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the staff numbers in full-time equivalent employed by his Department as at *(a)* 1 April 1995, *(b)* 1 October 1995, *(c)* 1 April 1996 and *(d)* 1 October 1996; and what is his estimate of the numbers who will be in post at 1 April 1997. [41030]

Mr. Hague: The number of full-time equivalent staff employed in my Department on the specified dates were:

(a) April 1995: 2,481

(b) October 1995: 2,406

(c) April 1996: 2,295

(d) October 1996: 2,248.

Staffing plans for 1997–98 will be published in the departmental report early next year in the usual way.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41191]

Mr. Hague: Expenditure, in 1996–97 prices, on external consultants engaged by the Welsh Office is as follows:

	£000
1991–92	1,267
1992–93	1,553
1993–94	1,550
1994–95	843
1995–96	1,212

There are no central records of the savings resulting from consultancy work.

M4

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each contract for repair and improvement works on the M4 since 1979, indicating the overall cost and cost per mile. [41158]

Mr. Hague: This information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

School Ballots

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many schools have held opt-out ballots since 1988, indicating those which were successful; and what percentage this constitutes of *(a)* pupils and *(b)* schools in the maintained sector in Wales. [41162]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Since 1988, 40 schools have held ballots of which 19 were in favour of applying for grant-maintained status. The schools at which ballots have been held represent 5.1 per cent. of the January 1996 pupil population and 1.9 per cent. of the total number of maintained schools in Wales.

Village Halls and Community Centres

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total grant paid in 1991–92, and each subsequent year, from the voluntary youth service, village halls and community centres programme. [41010]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is in the following list:

Expenditure, by the Welsh Office and plans from 1991–92 to 1996–97, in pounds thousands.

1991–92: 724

1992–93: 551

1993–94: 399

1994–95: 519

1995–96: 509

1996–97: 472.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the amount of funding that will be allocated to Welsh local authorities in 1997–98 when the responsibility for the voluntary youth service, village halls and community centres is transferred to them. [41012]

Mr. Evans: This will be the subject of consultation with the Welsh Local Government Association.

Millennium Exhibition

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received in relation to his fund-raising lunch for leaders of the Welsh business community in relation to the Greenwich millennium exhibition; and if he will make a statement. [41071]

Mr. Hague: I have received several letters of thanks for the lunch, with expressions of interest in the exhibition, and one letter expressing scepticism about the value of Welsh participation. I believe that the exhibition will provide an important marketing opportunity to project Welsh achievements to the wider world.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency concerning the arrangement for lending the agency chief executive to the Greenwich Millennium Exhibition plc for 90 days; what representations he has received concerning this arrangement; what assessment he has made of the principal advantages and disadvantages of the agency; and if he will make a statement. [41069]

Mr. Hague: I have discussed the arrangement with the chairman of the WDA and I have not received any representations concerning the appointment of Mr. Hartop as chief executive designate of the Millennium Exhibition Company. With the appointment of an acting chief executive with 12 years experience in the agency, I have been assured that the WDA will continue to operate successfully.

GCSE Scores

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average GCSE point score, where A*=7, for English language and mathematics for *(a)* girls and *(b)* boys in the maintained sector in (i) 1994, (ii) 1995 and (iii) 1996. [41166]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is available for 1994 and 1995 only, and is contained in the following table. Average GCSE point scores for English language and mathematics are given per 15-year-old pupil—age as at 31 August—in maintained schools.

Average GCSE point scores per 15-year-old pupil in maintained schools

	Girls	*Boys*
English language		
1994	4.2	3.7
1995	4.2	3.4
Mathematics		
1994	3.4	3.3
1995	3.4	3.3

1. Age as at 31 August.

2. Includes pupils in LEA maintained, grant maintained, special schools and pupil referral units.

3. Points have been allocated on the following basis A*=7, A=7, B=6, C=5, D=4, E=3, F=2, G=1.

Direct Labour and Service Organisations

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by authority, the surplus achieved on trading accounts of each service delivered by local authority direct labour or service organisations within the terms of the Local Government Act 1988. [41156]

Mr. Hague: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Nursery Places

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimate for unmet need for nursery places in Wales. [41053]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Some 90 per cent. of four-year-olds and 50 per cent. of three-year-olds attend maintained schools in Wales and some 1 per cent. of each, schools in the independent sector. Details of take-up of places in day care provision and in playgroups are not available. Provision in the maintained sector varies between and within local education authorities—from quarter to full time, and between places in nursery schools and nursery or reception classes in primary schools. There is no readily available information that this provision reflects parental choice.

Disabled People

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to improve transport facilities for disabled people. [41095]

Mr. Hague: I am keen to improve the accessibility of public transport services for disabled people. Under the Railways Act 1993, the Rail Regulator is responsible for protecting the interests of disabled rail passengers. All train and station operators are required to submit for the regulator's approval, a disabled people's protection policy, as a condition of being granted a licence to operate. In addition, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 provides my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport with powers to make regulations to require that new public transport vehicles are accessible to disabled people. The Act will apply to new rail vehicles, as well as to buses, coaches and taxis.

I understand that discussions are under way with the rail industry and the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee about the shape of the new regulations.

Discretionary Education Awards

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each of the last six years the amount spent by each local education authority on discretionary awards and the number of students receiving them by LEA and year. [41164]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested for the academic years 1989–90 to 1994–95, the latest year for which data are available, is given for the LEAs current at the time in the following table.

Discretionary awards: students domiciled in Wales[1]

Academic years	1989–90		1990–91		1991–92		1992–93		1993–94		1994–95	
	Number	Expenditure (£000)	Number	Expenditure (£000)	Number	Expenditure (£000)	Number	Expenditure (£000	Number	Expenditure (£000)	Number	Expenditure (£000)
Clwyd	1,114	1,771.7	1,172	1,948.7	2,595	4,348.8	3,174	2,092.6	1,889	1,018.5	518	800.0
Dyfed	2,029	1,915.4	2,077	2,445.1	2,049	2,159.2	1,595	1,893.4	988	817.2	792	235.0
Gwent	309	853.2	260	827.1	332	1,089.7	4,652	3,924.4	4,583	3,392.5	5,273	3,066.6
Gwynedd	2,242	798.3	2,351	1,059.8	3,028	1,384.4	3,215	1,176.6	3,234	1,189.3	3,347	999.2
Mid Glamorgan	3,450	1,591.4	3,370	1,480.0	4,671	4,462.6	5,122	4,941.7	3,612	1,583.8	3,569	1,263.2
Powys	665	785.1	702	947.3	829	1,127.2	782	1,002.5	656	646.9	642	577.7
South Glamorgan	602	1,214.3	771	1,508.0	845	1,511.3	2,829	1,002.2	3,665	1,235.7	3,145	791.3
West Glamorgan	312	849.7	396	1,039.1	455	1,318.6	311	983.1	902	964.5	798	577.5
Total[2]	10,723	9,779.2	11,099	11,255.2	14,804	17,402.0	21,711	17,049.0	19,529	10,848.5	18,185	8,410.5

Source: F503G, Department for Education and Employment.

[1] Awards made by local education authorities to students normally domiciled in Wales irrespective of their place of study: includes placement year sandwich students.

[2] Totals have been grossed to compensate for partial or missing returns.

Child Care Facilities

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provision he is currently making to develop child care facilities *(a)* in the workplace and *(b)* elsewhere; and what plans he has to extend such provision. [41098]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Welsh Office is supporting the development of child care for children of school age through the out of school child care grant initiative, and, for younger children, through the under-fives child care demonstration projects. The Government are currently consulting publicly on how child care might be developed, through the document "Work and Family: Ideas and Options for Child care", published by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

School Transport

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to ensure that all vehicles used to transport children to and from school during school hours meet the standards of safety demanded by parents. [41154]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The provision of school transport is a matter for local education authorities. I have advised authorities that I expect the transport they provide to be appropriate to ensure that pupils travel in safety and reasonable comfort, and that they should take such steps as they consider necessary to satisfy themselves of the appropriateness of both vehicle and driver. The Government have now made regulations which require seat belts to be fitted on minibuses and coaches used specifically for transporting children, which should further reassure parents who are concerned for the safety of their children.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to ensure that providers of places under the nursery voucher scheme will be under the same obligations as maintained schools to provide parents with information about Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector inspections. [41160]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: As a condition of grant, all nursery voucher scheme providers will be under the same obligations to make inspection reports available to parents, without charge.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is his estimate of the number of nursery vouchers required in each of the local education authorities in Wales; and if he will make a statement; [41266]

(2) how many nursery vouchers he expects to issue on the start-up of the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [41270]

Mr. Evans: All four-year-olds in Wales will be entitled to a nursery voucher, to be issued on a termly basis. The nursery voucher scheme contractor will identify the number of eligible children from the child benefit database and will send the parents or carers an application form for vouchers. A publicity campaign will alert parents or carers to the need to apply if they have not received a form. In exceptional circumstances, schools will hold a supply of forms for eligible children who have not received a voucher.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amounts of public money are earmarked for the nursery voucher scheme in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [41267]

Mr. Evans: The total cost of the scheme in Wales, including the cost of inspection and administration, is expected to be some £43 million. A final decision on the relevant levels of additional provision and present expenditure funding will be taken in the context of the public expenditure settlement for 1997–98.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he proposes to make available to local education authorities in Wales the findings of the nursery voucher scheme's pilot schemes in England; and if he will make a statement. [41268]

Mr. Evans: Welsh Office officials are having on-going discussions with representatives of the local education authorities in Wales on all aspects of the detailed operation of the voucher scheme, which will include discussions on phase 1. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment will be making a statement to the House on the evaluation of phase 1 during the autumn.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if, as a consequence of representations made to him concerning nursery vouchers, he will exempt Wales from the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [41269]

Mr. Evans: I have already written to the hon. Member and informed him that I have no such plans. To do so would deny parents throughout Wales the opportunity for choice in the type of education they want for their four-year-old children.

School Budgets

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the potential schools budget has been delegated by each local authority for its schools in each of the last five years; and what was the total of the potential schools budget in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms in each of these years in each local authority. [41195]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

School Inspections

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what estimate she has made of the savings from increasing the length of the inspection cycle from four to six years; and if she will reinvest those savings in local advice services to back up Office for Standards in Education inspection; [39923]

(2) what estimate she has made of the savings from focusing secondary school inspections after September 1997 on English, mathematics and science and up to four additional subjects only; and if she will reinvest those savings in local inspection and advice services to back up Ofsted inspections. [39924]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has accepted Her Majesty's chief inspector's recommendation that all school inspections should be on the basis of the existing framework for inspection, covering all national curriculum subjects. Some schools will be inspected more frequently and some less frequently than at present, and the total volume of inspections in any given year is therefore likely to be of a similar order as at present. Hence, it is unlikely that significant savings will arise. Provision for Ofsted will continue to be reviewed annually as part of the public expenditure survey.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have been awarded an assisted place since 1990; what is the cost for each year since 1990; and how much is proposed to be spent on the assisted places scheme for the years 1996–97 and 1997–98. [40591]

Mrs. Gillan: The number of children awarded assisted places in England in each academic year from 1990–91 to 1995–96, and the total cost of the scheme for each financial year, are given in the following table. Present spending plans for the financial years 1996–97 and 1997–98 are £117 million and £139 million respectively. Questions on the assisted places scheme in Scotland and Wales are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales. There is no assisted places scheme in Northern Ireland.

Assisted places scheme

Year	*Number of first year assisted places taken up*	*Total cost (£ million)*
1990–91	4,948	63.4
1991–92	5,602	75.8
1992–93	5,815	92.9
1993–94	5,775	92.3
1994–95	5,813	101.5
1995–96	5,744	104.8

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list in descending order the fees charged by schools participating in the assisted places scheme in the last academic year; indicating the average fee charged. [40584]

Mrs. Gillan: The average fee charged for assisted pupils in England in the academic year 1995–96 was £4,346. The average fee charged by each school participating in the scheme is given in the following table.

Assisted places scheme: academic year 1995–96

School name	*Average fee charged for APs*[1] *£*
Charterhouse, Nr Godalming	9,543
Bradfield College, Reading	8,696
Winchester College	8,635
Canford School, Wimborne	8,341
Bedales School, Petersfield	8,259
Hurstpierpoint College, Hassocks	7,934
Felsted School, Dunmow	7,903
Stowe School Nr Buckingham	7,867
Leighton Park School, Reading	7,787
Tonbridge School	7,779
Repton School, Nr Derby	7,767
Aldenham School, Elstree	7,757
Wellington College, Berkshire	7,647
Gresham's School, Norfolk	7,644
Ardingly College, Haywards Heath	7,595
Sedbergh School	7,556
Malvern College	7,501
Carmel College, Wallingford	7,423
Wycliffe College, Stonehouse	7,413
Leys School, Cambridge	7,370
Cranleigh School	7,192
Downe House School, Newbury	7,118
Monkton Combe School, Bath	7,091
Haileybury and Imperial Service College	7,025
Westminster School	6,990
Cheltenham Ladies' College	6,964
Clifton College, Bristol	6,959
Bishop's Stortford College	6,928
Bloxham School, Banbury	6,905
Pangbourne College, Reading	6,859
Stonyhurst College, Nr Blackburn	6,754
Rendcombe College, Cirencester	6,693
King's School, Bruton	6,666
Mill Hill School	6,626
St. Paul's School, Barnes	6,593
Christ's Hospital	6,564
Lord Wandsworth College, Basingstoke	6,552
St. Mary and St. Anne	6,552
Epsom College	6,551

Assisted places scheme: academic year 1995–96

School name	Average fee charged for APs[1] £
St. John's School, Leatherhead	6,535
Sutton Valence School, Nr Maidstone	6,422
Brighton College	6,401
St. Bees School, Cumbria	6,323
Durham School	6,221
Denstone College, Uttoxeter	6,207
Sevenoaks School, Kent	6,196
St. Lawrence College, Ramsgate	6,150
Ellesmere College	6,147
Reed's School, Cobham	6,147
St. Swithun's School, Winchester	6,128
Chigwell School	6,114
Merchant Taylors', Northwood	6,073
Taunton School	6,056
Dulwich College	6,042
St. George's College, Weybridge	6,037
Highgate School	6,003
Bedford School	5,982
University College School, London NW3	5,954
Dauntsey's School, Devizes	5,921
Oakham School, Rutland	5,919
Berkhamsted School	5,917
Godolphin School, Salisbury	5,887
King's College School, Wimbledon	5,885
Framlingham College	5,870
Friend's School, Saffron Walden	5,799
Wrekin College	5,776
King's School, Rochester	5,721
Mount School, York	5,712
Dover College	5,683
Culford School, Bury St. Edmunds	5,623
St. Felix School, Southwold	5,619
St. Paul's Girls School, Hammersmith	5,598
Bootham School, York	5,591
St. Peter's School, York	5,563
Worksop College, Nottingham	5,547
Trent College, Derbyshire	5,527
Alleyn's School, Dulwich	5,513
King Edward's School, Witley	5,505
City of London Freeman's School, Ashtead	5,497
Harrogate Ladies' College	5,486
City of London School	5,469
St. Mary's Hall, Brighton	5,458
Rossall School, Fleetwood	5,453
Royal Grammar School, Guildford	5,391
Queen's College Taunton	5,343
James Allen's Girls School	5,304
Bromsgrove School, Worcestershire	5,275
St. Catherine's School, Bramley	5,260
Godolphin and Latymer School, London W6	5,250
Giggleswick School, Settle	5,220
Woodbridge School, Suffolk	5,218
St. Edmund's College, Ware	5,210
Walthamstow Hall, Sevenoaks	5,157
Casterton School, Cumbria	5,146
Mount St. Mary's College, Nr Sheffield	5,105
Wellingborough School	5,101
Silcoates School	5,097
Haberdashers' Aske's School	5,094
Colston's Collegiate School, Bristol	5,086
Douai School, Reading	5,068
Kent College, Canterbury	5,067
Whitgift School, Croydon	5,017
Wells Cathedral School	5,014
Burgess Hill School for Girls	5,008
Caterham School	5,007
Queen's College, London W1	5,001
Kingswood School, Bath	4,995
Ratcliffe College, Leicestershire	4,981
Berkhamsted School for Girls	4,937
King's School, Worcester	4,883

Assisted places scheme: academic year 1995–96

School name	Average fee charged for APs[1] £
Ashford School, Kent	4,878
Trinity School of John Whitgift, Croydon	4,875
Eltham College, London SE9	4,870
St. Margaret's School, Bushey	4,861
City of London School for Girls	4,838
John Lyon School, Harrow	4,808
Edgehill College, Bideford	4,789
Scarborough College	4,784
Churcher's College, Petersfield	4,740
Brentwood School	4,725
Ursuline Convent School, Kent	4,677
Kimbolton School, Cambridge	4,656
Ashville School	4,645
Ipswich School	4,611
Laxton School	4,606
St. Albans School	4,605
Guildford High School for Girls	4,586
Kingston Grammar School	4,580
Latymer Upper School, London W6	4,576
Holy Child School	4,575
St. Benedict's School, Ealing	4,572
Abingdon School	4,560
Woodhouse Grove School, Bradford	4,542
Bancroft's School, Woodford	4,524
Francis Holland School, London NW1	4,503
Bedford High School	4,485
St. Helen's School, Northwood	4,485
Forest School, London E17	4,483
West Buckland School, Barnstaple	4,476
Pocklington School, Nr York	4,469
Emanuel School, London SW11	4,438
Prior Park College, Bath	4,416
North London Collegiate School, Edgware	4,386
Edgbaston C of E College for Girls	4,377
Magdalen College School, Oxford	4,376
Surbiton High School	4,368
Lady Eleanor Holles School, Hampton	4,365
Tormead School, Guildford	4,365
Yarm School	4,362
Wisbech Grammar School	4,355
Hampton School	4,326
St. Dunstan's College, Catford	4,323
Barnard Castle School	4,314
Colfe's School, London SE12	4,313
St. Albans High School for Girls	4,266
Reigate Grammar School	4,264
Hereford Cathedral School	4,263
Perse School for Boys, Cambridge	4,233
Royal Grammar School, Worcester	4,230
King Edward's School, Birmingham	4,218
Wolverhampton Grammar School	4,212
Headington School, Oxford	4,210
Ackworth School, Pontefract	4,206
Derby High School	4,205
King Edward VI School, Southampton	4,200
Talbot Heath School, Bournemouth	4,194
St. Maurs Convent, Weybridge	4,174
Warwick School	4,164
Bolton School (Boys)	4,155
Bolton School (Girls)	4,155
Alice Ottley School, Worcester	4,152
Truro School	4,142
Bedford Modern School	4,140
Plymouth College	4,113
Farnborough Hill School	4,111
Wellington School, Somerset	4,103
Liverpool College	4,088
Clifton High School, Bristol	4,061
Solihull School	4,060
Norwich School	4,059
Ryde School	4,059

Assisted places scheme: academic year 1995–96

School name	*Average fee charged for APs*[1] £
Austin Friars School	4,026
King's School, Macclesfield	4,026
Croham Hurst School, Croydon	4,019
Ursuline High School, Ilford	3,999
Polam Hall School, Darlington	3,976
Nottingham High School	3,970
Northampton High School	3,942
Stafford Independent Grammar School	3,936
Kingsley School	3,927
South Hampstead High School GPDST	3,914
Croydon High School GPDST	3,912
William Hulme Grammar School	3,912
Blackheath High School GPDST	3,909
Bromley High School GPDST	3,909
Heathfield School GPDST	3,909
Notting Hill and Ealing High GPDST	3,909
Putney High School GPDST	3,909
Streatham Hill and Clapham High GPDST	3,909
Sutton High School GPDST	3,909
Sydenham High School GPDST	3,909
Wimbledon High School GPDST	3,909
Bristol Cathedral School	3,897
Dame Alice Harpur School	3,891
Exeter School	3,887
St. Joseph's College, Ipswich	3,885
Leeds Girls High School	3,879
Cheadle Hulme School	3,870
Stamford High School	3,849
King Edward's School at Bath	3,846
Loughborough Grammar	3,846
Stamford School	3,846
Queen Elizabeth Hospital School, Bristol	3,843
King Edward VI High School, Birmingham	3,840
Leeds Grammar School	3,813
Manchester Grammar School	3,805
Portsmouth Grammar School	3,788
Bradford Girls Grammar	3,787
Stockport Grammar School	3,771
King's School, Chester	3,768
Old Palace School, Croydon	3,765
Maynard School, Exeter	3,764
Perse School for Girls	3,756
Red Maids' School, Bristol	3,750
St. Bede's College, Manchester	3,738
Marist Convent Senior School, Ascot	3,725
St. Joseph's Convent, Reading	3,725
Truro High School	3,714
Bradford Grammar School	3,711
Abbey School, Reading	3,699
Queen Elizabeth Grammar, Wakefield	3,699
Wakefield High School	3,699
Bristol Grammar School	3,697
Redland High School, Bristol	3,687
St. Helen and St. Katherine, Abingdon	3,687
La Sagesse Convent School, Newcastle	3,683
Manchester High School	3,672
Queen Elizabeth Grammar, Blackburn	3,672
St. Mary's School, Cambridge	3,618
King's High School for Girls, Warwick	3,610
Sir William Perkins's School, Chertsey	3,583
St. Margaret's School, Exeter	3,575
Haberdashers' Aske's Schools for Girls	3,570
St. Mary's College, Crosby	3,526
Hulme Grammar, Boys, Oldham	3,510
Hulme Grammar, Girls, Oldham	3,510
Merchant Taylors' Girls, Liverpool	3,504
Merchant Taylors', Liverpool	3,503
Portsmouth High School GPDST	3,498
Arnold School, Blackpool	3,489
Bath High School GPDST	3,489
Belvedere School GPDST Liverpool	3,489

Assisted places scheme: academic year 1995–96

School name	*Average fee charged for APs*[1] £
Birkenhead High School GPDST	3,489
Brighton and Hove High School GPDST	3,489
Central Newcastle High School GPDST	3,489
Ipswich High School GPDST	3,489
Norwich High School GPDST	3,489
Nottingham Girls High School GPDST	3,489
Oxford High School GPDST	3,489
Sheffield High School GPDST	3,489
Shrewsbury High School GPDST	3,489
Loughborough High School	3,483
Colston's Girls School	3,468
Leicester Grammar School	3,462
Withington Girls School, Manchester	3,441
St. John's College, Southsea	3,425
Royal Grammar School, Newcastle	3,414
Bruton School for Girls	3,399
Coventry School, Bablake	3,399
Coventry School, King Henry VIII	3,399
King's School, Tynemouth	3,396
Westholme School, Blackburn	3,393
Newcastle Upon Tyne Church High School	3,389
St. Edward's College, Liverpool	3,389
Dame Allan's Boys School, Newcastle	3,384
Dame Allan's Girls School	3,384
Queen's School, Chester	3,375
Hymers College, Hull	3,373
Teesside High School	3,364
Kirkham Grammar School	3,337
Birkenhead School	3,333
Bury Grammar School (Boys)	3,300
Bury Grammar School (Girls)	3,300
Batley Grammar School	3,273
Newcastle Under Lyme School, Staffs	3,266
King Edward VII School, Lytham	3,219
Queen Mary School, Lytham	3,219
Mount Carmel School, Cheshire	3,162
St. Ambrose College, Altrincham	3,156
St. Joseph's College, Stoke on Trent	3,135
Hipperholme Grammar School	3,031
Loreto Convent Grammar School, Altrincham	2,787
Salesian College, Farnborough	2,787

[1] Includes tuition fees, fees for public examinations and other fees allowed for by schools' participation agreements.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many assisted places are available for the academic year 1996–97 in *(a)* the primary and *(b)* the secondary sector; and how many have been taken up. [40581]

Mrs. Gillan: The number of assisted places available for children below age 11 entering participating schools in England in academic year 1996–97 is 855. For children aged 11 to 13 there are 6,915 entry places and a further 1,899 places for direct entry into sixth forms. The total number of assisted places available in 1996–97, including places allocated in previous years, is 37,816. Final figures for take-up are not yet available, but preliminary indications are that take-up at entry continues to be high.

Student Grants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average grant received by students in *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95 and *(d)* 1995–96; and if she will make a statement. [40578]

Mr. Forth: The average net maintenance grants after means testing received by mandatory award holders in England and Wales in the academic years 1992–93 to 1994–95, the latest year for which data are available, are set out in the following table. Since 1990–91, eligible students have also had access to non-means-tested students loans.

Average net maintenance grants to holders of mandatory awards (£) England and Wales: 1992–93 to 1994–95

Academic year	*Average net maintenance grant paid by local education authorities to the nearest £10*
1992–93	1,610
1993–94	1,670
1994–95	1,520

School Funding

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for education and Employment what is the education budget and what proportion has been delegated to schools in the current financial year, in each English and Welsh local education authority; and if she will make a statement. [40590]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows, for each local education authority in England, the amount of the potential schools budget and the percentage delegated to schools. The figures related to the financial year 1996–97. Information regarding the funding os schools in wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Local education authority	*PSB £,000*	*Percentage PSB delegated*
Barking/Dagenham	61,126	90.5
Barnet	75,939	89.4
Barnsley	61,681	88.7
Bath and North-east Somerset	48,609	89.7
Bedfordshire	152,251	92.4
Berkshire	195,984	93.5
Bexley	60,283	91.9
Birmingham	345,728	91.3
Bolton	80,692	88.5
Bradford	150,477	89.7
Brent	47,858	94.6
Bristol	112,495	90.7
Bromley	44,048	86.9
Buckinghamshire	174,158	89.1
Bury	54,406	92.5
Calderdale	427,64	89.1
Cambridgeshire	159,124	89.5
Camden	57,003	88.2
Cheshire	301,969	91.3
Cornwall	136,921	88.3
Corporation of London	761	89.9
Coventry	106,109	90.9
Croydon	75,817	91.3
Cumbria	113,416	91.3
Derbyshire	222,302	89.2
Devon	270,890	91.2
Doncaster	102,611	87.9
Dorset	144,951	89.7
Dudley	78,438	96.1
Durham	180,197	88.6
Ealing	71,556	90.5
East Riding	96,389	89.6
East Sussex	189,069	90.1
Enfield	81,133	90.2
Essex	278,140	90.1
Gateshead	63,294	86.8
Gloucestershire	92,634	91.2
Greenwich	89,798	93.1
Hackney	66,319	89.4
Hammersmith/Fulham	39,290	91.2
Hampshire	424,463	91.1
Haringey	77,147	86.4
Harrow	64,591	90.1
Hartlepoool	30,587	89.1
Havering	65,236	92.1
Hereford/Worcester	182,361	90.3
Hertfordshire	271,592	93.6
Hillingdon	43,534	90.2
Hounslow	74,553	90.0
Hull	82,212	89.8
Isle of Wight	37,173	89.8
Isles of Scilly	902	93.3
Islington	58,608	93.9
Kensington/Chelsea	26,852	90.7
Kent	344,908	89.0
Kingston	32,964	90.8
Kirklees	116,341	89.0
Knowsley	56,775	93.1
Lambeth	53,359	87.4
Lancashire	414,077	88.9
Leeds	220,601	93.7
Leicestershire	281,645	88.0
Lewisham	82,202	89.9
Lincolnshire	131,670	89.3
Liverpool	152,041	92.7
Manchester	143,067	91.8
Merton	48,209	89.7
Middlesbrough	50,342	88.0
North-east Lincolnshire	56,063	89.8
Newcastle	83,740	89.0
Newham	91,614	85.1
Norfolk	186,841	91.2
North Lincolnshire	51,172	88.8
North Somerset	56,162	89.6
North Tyneside	58,734	92.0
North Yorkshire	168,846	90.5
Northamptonshire	163,777	92.9
Northumberland	95,647	91.1
Nottinghamshire	296,611	88.9
Oldham	83,982	90.7
Oxfordshire	154,956	92.0
Redbridge	78,182	91.9
Redcar and Cleveland	50,199	88.9
Richmond	42,377	91.3
Rochdale	57,693	93.3
Rotherham	86,343	89.6
Salford	71,365	90.6
Sandwell	98,885	89.2
Sefton	95,490	89.4
Sheffield	134,029	87.4
Shropshire	110,326	91.8
Solihull	67,562	94.4
Somerset	129,049	91.2
South Gloucestershire	77,194	89.8
South Tyneside	48,326	88.9
Southwark	70,401	89.3
St Helens	59,467	89.9
Staffordshire	293,568	93.0
Stockport	81,968	91.2
Stockton on Tees	63,165	90.4
Suffolk	193,131	92.6

Local education authority	PSB £,000	Percentage PSB delegated
Sunderland	95,675	93.8
Surrey	215,844	90.5
Sutton	37,808	91.4
Tameside	60,908	89.9
Tower Hamlets	86,792	89.5
Trafford	53,731	88.5
Wakefield	96,044	87.2
Walsall	78,003	89.9
Waltham Forest	69,543	93.9
Wandsworth	53,758	89.5
Warwickshire	129,650	89.8
West Sussex	205,497	89.2
Westminster	46,245	89.4
Wigan	102,072	92.9
Wiltshire	127,525	90.0
Wirral	101,837	90.7
Wolverhampton	76,544	92.2
York	46,598	89.0

1. The Potential Schools Budget (PSB) is the yardstick usually employed to measure the level of delegation achieved by LEAs. The PSB represents the total planned expenditure on schools maintained by an LEA less certain items which have been considered impracticable or undesirable to delegate.

2. The figures are derived from those provided by each LEA in its statement of planned financial expenditure produced under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988 and incorporate revisions notified to the Department up to 30 September 1996.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received from pre-school providers whose rolls have decreased as a result of competition from other providers in phase one of the voucher scheme; and if she will list those providers. [40538]

Mr. Robin Squire: Of more than 640 private and voluntary providers registered for the voucher scheme at April 1996, I am aware of six that have asked to withdraw, citing competition from other providers. These are:

Long Stratton Playgroup, Norwich

Bradwell Plagroup, Great Yarmouth

Marsham Playgroup, Norwich

Lingwood Pre-School, Norwich

Busy Bees, North Walsham

Sandringham and West Newton Pre-School.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many four-year-olds were in *(a)* private, *(b)* voluntary and *(c)* local education authority pre-school provision, in each of the phase 1 areas of the nursery voucher scheme, at the latest date for which figures are available before 1 April 1996; and how many are provided for in each sector, in each phase one area, at the latest date for which figures are available. [40527]

Mr. Squire: The available information is shown in the following table. Information on pupils in voluntary and private provision is not collected centrally.

Pupils aged four[1] in maintained schools in phase 1 local education authority areas—January 1996

LEA	Primary schools: Nursery schools	Primary schools: Nursery classes	Primary schools: Infant classes[2]	Special schools	Total
Wandsworth	70	729	1,666	9	2,474
Westminster	66	449	538	0	1,053
Kensington and Chelsea	96	269	368	0	733
Norfolk	134	537	5,490	26	6,187

[1] Pupils born between 1 January and 31 December 1991.

[2] Includes pupils in reception classes.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many eligible children in each of the four pilot authorities have not taken up their entitlement to apply for a nursery voucher; and what research she proposes to identify which parents and children are not currently receiving vouchers. [40529]

Mr. Squire: The estimated number of children eligible for vouchers in each of the phase 1 authorities and the number of children for whom vouchers have been issued is shown in the following table. Estimates of population are less reliable when broken down both by local authority area and by year group. Non-take-up of vouchers will be analysed in the evaluation statement to be provided in the autumn.

	Estimated number of eligible children	Number of children for whom vouchers have been issued
Norfolk	9,300	8,976
Kensington and Chelsea	1,650	1,151
Wandsworth	3,300	3,170
Westminster	1,900	1,414

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what advice she has issued to the pilot authorities in respect of the admission of four-year-olds who do not have a voucher. [40531]

Mr. Squire: Guidance has been issued to the phase 1 authorities on the procedure by which headteachers can, in exceptional cases, apply for vouchers on behalf of their pupils. Guidance on the interaction of nursery education vouchers and admissions arrangements is currently being sent to all local education authorities and maintained primary schools.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 26 June *Official Report*, column *158*, how much has been spent on publicity, in each of the four pilot authorities and overall, at the latest date for which figures are available; and what was the projected publicity budget in phase one of the voucher scheme. [40574]

Mr. Squire: The original budget for providing information to parents and providers in the financial year 1995–96 in the phase 1 areas was £750,000. This was revised to £1.1 million to meet the unexpectedly high demand for information nationwide. The estimated budget for the financial year 1996–97 is £300,000, of which £175,000 has been spent to date.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 16 July, *Official Report,* column *466,* how many four-year-olds in each local authority participating in the pilot phase of the voucher scheme to date have been enrolled who did not have a voucher at the time of their enrolment; and how many applications have been made by providers on behalf of such children. [40576]

Mr. Squire: Of the 14,711 vouchers issued for the summer term, 1,166 were issued after the start of that term. Of these, 300 were issued in response to applications by maintained schools on behalf of eligible children.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average unit cost per pupil for provision in *(a)* nursery schools, *(b)* nursery classes in primary schools, *(c)* reception classes in primary schools *(d)* and playgroups, at the latest date for which figures are available. [40537]

Mr. Squire: The average unit cost per full-time equivalent pupil in 1994–95 for those categories of under fives' provision for which estimates are available nationally are as follows:

1994–95 estimates for England

	£
Nursery schools	3,500
Nursery classes in primary schools	2,880
Primary classes (including under 5s)	1,640
Average	2,150

Comparable data for playgroups are not collected centrally.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made or received of the cost of administration arising from the voucher scheme, in respect of *(a)* each of the pilot local education authorities, *(b)* providers in each area and *(c)* her Department. [40530]

Mr. Squire: Grant aid was made available to the four local education authorities taking part in the first phase of the voucher scheme in respect of the extra costs incurred in participating in phase 1 compared to joining phase 2. Details were set out on 29 April 1996, *Official Report,* column *348.* No detailed estimate of administration costs has been made in respect of providers in each area. The estimated cost of administering the nursery voucher scheme from April 1997 is not expected to exceed 2.7 per cent. of the total cost of the nursery voucher scheme. Some two-thirds of the administration costs are expected to cover the new system of inspection.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what notification she has received in respect of pre-school providers who have gone out of business as a result of competition from other providers in the phase 1 areas of the nursery voucher scheme; and if she will list those organisations notified to her. [40532]

Mr. Squire: Of more than 640 private and voluntary providers registered for the voucher scheme at April 1996, four have notified the nursery voucher centre that they have since closed, but none gave a reason.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many providers have received initial validation to accept voucher-bearing children, in the *(a)* maintained, *(b)* voluntary and *(c)* private sectors; and how many, in each sector, consequent to initial validation (i) have already been inspected, (ii) will be inspected during the autumn term and (iii) will be inspected during the spring term. [40533]

Mr. Squire: A total of 494 providers in the maintained sector and 647 providers in the private and voluntary sectors are participating in phase 1 of the scheme. I understand from the chief inspector of schools that approximately 300 providers will be inspected in the autumn term and approximately 350 in the spring term.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment her Department has made during the first term of the pilot phase of the impact of the voucher scheme on children with special educational needs. [40535]

Mr. Squire: The nursery education voucher scheme brings the prospect of earlier identification and intervention for children with special education needs. To achieve this end, providers who are not maintained schools will have a duty to have regard to the code of practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs and associated guidance. Following discussions with the National Portage Association, and a trial in phase 1, portage services registered with the National Portage Association will be allowed to redeem nursery vouchers in phase 2.

National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the latest estimate of the development costs for establishing national vocational qualifications; and if she will make a statement. [40755]

Mr. Paice: Expenditure through the Department's programmes on development costs of national vocational qualifications between 1988 and March 1996 is £106 million. This figure includes £83 million from the standards programme and £23 million grant in aid to the National Council for Vocational Qualifications.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her Department's estimate of the number of people who have obtained a national vocational qualification. [40754]

Mr. Paice: According to the National Council for Vocational Qualifications and the Scottish Vocational Education Council, there have been 1,203,159 national vocational qualifications and 33,707 Scottish vocational qualifications awarded respectively up till 30 June 1996.

Provisional estimates from the spring 1996 Labour Force Survey show that 1.2 million people reported that they held an NVQ or SVQ.

Anti-drugs Programmes

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the impact of the *(a)* DARE—drug abuse resistance education—and *(b)* other anti-drugs programmes in reducing the use of illegal drugs. [40605]

Mrs. Gillan: The 16 innovative drug education and prevention projects supported under the Department's grants for education support and training programme in 1995–96 have been independently evaluated. The Department intends to publish a booklet later this year summarising the findings. One project, in Kirklees local education authority, dealt with, among other things, an evaluation of a pilot of the DARE—drug abuse resistance education—programme.

In addition, the Office for Standards in Education is undertaking a specific study of provision for drug education in schools during this academic year. A report will be published shortly.

Promotional Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much her Department has spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotions, and *(c)* hospitality in each of the last six years. [40623]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following figures are given in financial years.

Before the merger in July 1995, the Department operated separately funded programmes of publicity. This continued until the end of the financial year 1995–96. Figures for promotional work are not separately available.

Department for Education

	Publicity £ million
1990–91	5.3
1991–92	9.0
1992–93	8.0
1993–94	10.1
1994–95	9.4
1995–96	5.4

Department of Employment

	Publicity £ million
1990–91	2.6
1991–92	18.3
1992–93	7.2
1993–94	11.1
1994–95	11.1
1995–96	11.0

The first year for which figures for expenditure on hospitality are available is 1993–94. Figures for the earlier years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The combined figures for the two Departments are:

1993–94: £121,000

1994–95: £88,000

1995–96: £98,000.

Nursery Education Inspectors

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many people have embarked on a course to become a nursery education inspector; how many have successfully completed that course; what is the total number of qualified nursery education inspectors; and what were the recruitment targets; [40528]

(2) if she will require that inspections of voucher-bearing institutions be carried out during term time, when voucher-bearing children are present. [40534]

Mr. Robin Squire: These are matters for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Student Loans Company

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the Student Loans Company's 1996 annual report and accounts will be available. [41202]

Mr. Forth: I have today placed copies of the report and accounts in the Library.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what revisions she proposes in respect of the framework document, setting out the aim and objectives of the Employment Service, with particular reference to the roles and responsibilities of the Secretary of state and the chief executive, following the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance. [41203]

Mr. Forth: The framework document for the Employment Service has been revised to take account of the recommendations of the prior options review and the changed responsibilities and objectives of ES following the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance. Copies of the new framework document have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what revisions she proposes in respect of the agreement between herself and the Secretary of state for Social Security on the administration of benefits for unemployed people, in respect of the introduction of jobseeker's allowance. [41201]

Mr. Forth: The agreement on the administration of unemployment benefit and income support for unemployed people became obsolete when jobseeker's allowance replaced those benefits on 7 October. A new agreement on jobseeker's allowance and related issues came into force. Copies of this agreement have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Social Affairs Council

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the outcome of the EU Social Affairs Council on 24 September. [41204]

Mr. Paice: My noble Friend the Minister of State attended the Social Affairs Council in Brussels on 24 September.

There was a discussion of a draft decision setting up an Employment and Labour Market Committee. General support for the principle of establishing a committee was expressed.

The posted workers directive was adopted as an "A" point. The UK and Portugal voted against the directive. Common position was reached unanimously on an amendment to the carcinogens directive.

There was a series of presentations, including a Commission presentation on a Commission communication on information and consultation of workers, a presidency progress report on the single report on employment for the second Dublin European Council in December, information on the burden of proof directive, which is being taken forward by the other member states under the social protocol and a Commission Green Paper on the social and societal aspects of the information society.

School Transport

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list those schools in Staffordshire which have been inspected by the Health and Safety Executive, indicating their findings in respect of health and safety in respect of school transport arrangements. [40742]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

HSE inspectors have limited enforcement responsibilities for school transport. The safety of school transport vehicles, on the road are covered by various Road Traffic Acts which are enforced by the police or Department of Transport.

However, HSE inspectors will normally discuss during school inspections the management arrangements for health and safety during school activities, and this might include discussion on the arrangements in place for managing health and safety during school trips in the school's own transport or in that from a contractor, and for the movement of vehicles on school premises.

In Staffordshire, policies on school transport and trips have been discussed by HSE inspectors with individual schools and centrally with Staffordshire education authority. The education authority produced a comprehensive policy on school transport in 1995 and this appears to have been implemented at schools recently visited. These include:

Thomas Alleyne's High School, Uttoxeter
Paulet High School, Burton on Trent
Mary Hill Comprehensive, Kidsgrove
Leek High School, Leek
Merryfields Special School, Newcastle under Lyme
Flash Ley County First School, Stafford
Haywood High School, Burslem
Leasowes County Infants, Stafford
Clayton High School, Newcastle
St. Nicholas CE First School, Codsall
Marshlands Special School, Stafford
St. Dominics Independent Girls School, Stafford
St. Chads Cathedral School, Lichfield.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans for the location of the pay and pensions branches of the Metropolitan police. [40221]

Mr. Maclean: Between May and August 1996, the Metropolitan police conducted a review of the provision of police and civil staff pay and pension services. The Metropolitan police policy board will shortly be deciding whether to accept the review report's recommendations that pay and pension services should be contracted out, subject to the approval of the Secretary of State as police authority. If contracting out were to take place, the successful contractor or contractors, and the location or locations at which the work would be carried out, would not be identified until the middle of 1997 at the earliest.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will extend the remit of the Metropolitan police committee to include reporting on any matters which they consider requires his attention. [40402]

Mr. Maclean: Mr right hon. and learned Friend announced to this House on 9 February 1995 the appointment of the Metropolitan police committee. He gave details of the terms of reference of the MPC. There are no plans to change these terms of reference.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce the number of civilian staff employed by the Metropolitan police. [40818]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that as well as on-going efficiency savings, he has recently initiated a specific review of central support services within the Metropolitan police. The review focused on posts primarily held by civilian staff. Following a consultation period, the Commissioner will discuss the recommendations with his senior colleagues. Final proposals are expected shortly.

Metropolitan Police

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recent report by Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary on the No. 3 area (north-east) of the Metropolitan police. [41280]

Mr. Maclean: Yes. I have today placed in the Library a note of the recommendations from the report, together with the Commissioner's responses and the police authority responses, which take into account the advice my right hon. and learned Friend and I have received from the Metropolitan police committee.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions over the past 12 months there were two or fewer traffic division cars, other than those dedicated to work on the M25, operating in the Metropolitan police area. [40332]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* Records prior to January 1996 do not show this precise information. The Commissioner tells me that from January 1996 to August 1996—inclusive—records show that on no occasion were there two or fewer traffic division cars, other than those dedicated to work on the M25, operating in the Metropolitan police district.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of police officers dedicated to traffic division operations in the past 10 years in the Metropolitan police area. [40339]

Mr. Maclean: No records were kept of the number of police officers dedicated to traffic division operations prior to 1994. Figures since then are as follows:

Rank	1994 (as at 31 December)	1995 (as at 31 December)	1996[1] (as at 31 August)
Superintendent	8	0	0
Chief Inspector	8	5	5
Inspector	30	30	27
Police Sergeant	101	108	109
Police Constable	670	689	685
Total	817	832	826

[1] The 1996 figures are provisional.

Police (M25)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what extent the number of police officers dedicated to policing the M25 has varied over the past 10 years, to take account of the changing traffic flows on the motorway; and if he will make a statement.[40331]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* Allocation of police resources to the M25 is an operational matter for the chief officers concerned. They are represented on a dedicated M25 group within the national motorway conference of the Association of Chief Police Officers Traffic Committee. I understand that resources are used in a flexible way to match them to anticipated demands and that a number of factors are taken into account including the time of day, the season and the sector of the motorway.

Operation Bumble Bee

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the change in the number of burglaries in Greater London since the introduction of Operation Bumble Bee. [40458]

Mr. Maclean: Operation Bumble Bee was launched, on 1 June 1993, as a Metropolitan police initiative against burglary. Comparison of the 12-month rolling recorded burglary figures, incorporating both residential and non-residential burglary offences, for the Metropolitan police district for the years to May 1993 and to August 1996 are as in the following table:

	Offences
June 1992 to May 1993	189,514
July 1995 to June 1996	165,566
Variation	–23,948
Percentage change	–13

Amyl-Nitrate

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to restrict over-the-counter sales of amyl-nitrate to juniors; and if he will make a statement. [40768]

Mr. Sackville: I understand from the Medicines Control Agency that products containing amyl-nitrate are not legally available over the counter. They are medicinal products and are controlled by the Medicines Act 1968. Only doctors and chemists can supply this type of medicine to the public and their sale from other outlets is illegal.

The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs has considered on a number of occasions whether alkyl-nitrates, of which amyl-nitrate is one, should be controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. On the last occasion, in 1995, the council concluded that they did not give rise to a social problem justifying their control under the provisions of the 1971 Act. That remains the present position, but the situation will continue to be monitored.

Civil Defence Grant

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement concerning the planned levels for local authority civil defence grant for 1997–98 and subsequent financial years. [40819]

Mr. Sackville: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mortgage Fraud

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend the criminal law in relation to mortgage frauds following the decision of the House of Lords in R *v.* Preddy, R *v.* Slade and R *v.* Dhillon (1996) 3 All ER 481; and if he will make a statement. [40434]

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) on 15 October 1996.

Military Corrective Centre, Colchester

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures have been adopted to designate the military corrective centre at Colchester a young offender institution; when the procedures were implemented; and if he will make a statement [40431]

Miss Widdecombe: The building at the military corrective training centre which we intend to use as a young offender institution will be declared to be such in the normal way by the Director General of the Prison Service acting on behalf of the Secretary of State under section 33(2) of the Prison Act 1952.

Promotional Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department has spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotion and *(c)* hospitality in each of the last six years. [40616]

Mr. Howard: The information requested is provided in the table.

Financial years	Publicity £	Promotion £	Hospitality £
1990–91	9,982,136	69,340	30,080
1991–92	10,570,379	305,849	28,094
1992–93	12,745,124	228,493	55,651
1993–94	14,028,929	123,620	49,017
1994–95	14,034,417	67,941	27,468
1995–96	10,731,655	57,454	38,604

Metropolitan Police Brass Band

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has *(a)* to reduce the funding of or *(b)* to disband the Metropolitan police brass band. [40817]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that a recent review of the Metropolitan police central support services has recommended replacing the current full-time civilian Metropolitan police band with a less expensive alternative. Following a consultation period, the Commissioner will discuss this and other recommendations with his senior colleagues. Final proposals are expected shortly.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many answers to *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by his Department in each of the past two years. [40634]

Mr. Howard: This is a matter of public record.

Wheel Clamping

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on proposals to regulate the activities of firms engaging in wheel clamping vehicles on private land. [40442]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend has received representations from the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock), the Automobile Association, the British Parking Association, and legislation on car clamping.

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce proposals arising from his consultation on wheel clamping. [40296]

Mr. Maclean: The Government are still considering what action should be taken to regulate wheel clamping on private land. We shall make an announcement as soon as possible.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will issue further guidance on the position of female asylum seekers from China who base their claim for asylum on Chinese laws specifying forced abortion, contraception and sterilisation; [41086]

(2) if asylum caseworkers have been instructed to take into account the threat of forcible abortion or sterilisation; [41085]

(3) if asylum caseworkers have now been instructed to take into account forced contraception, with particular reference to the forced insertion of intra-uterine devices. [41084]

Miss Widdecombe: A copy of the guidance which has been issued to asylum caseworkers on applications involving allegations of forcible abortion, sterilisation or genital mutilation has been placed in the Library. Where other forms of physical abuse are alleged, these are considered in the light of the circumstances of each case.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people who had applied for asylum were deported from *(a)* Doncaster prison and *(b)* The Wolds prison during each month from May to September; and what were the nationalities of those deported; [40869]

(2) how many people who had applied for asylum were detained in *(a)* Doncaster prison and *(b)* The Wolds prison during each month from May to September; and what were the nationalities of those detained. [40868]

Mr. Kirkhope: I will write to the hon. Member.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41180]

Mr. Howard: I will write to the hon. Member.

Buckley Hall Prison

Mr. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the current full complement by grade of *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time staff, employed by Group 4 at HMP Buckley Hall; and what changes to staffing levels have occurred in the last three months; [40980]

(2) what percentage of temporary release decisions have resulted in temporary release failures at *(a)* HMP Buckley Hall and *(b)* other male category C training prisons since (i) 9 July 1996 and (ii) 14 December 1994; [40976]

(3) if he will specify *(a)* what injuries were sustained by the prisoner Keith Tierney following his assault by another prisoner at HMP Buckley Hall in August, *(b)* what level of medical treatment was received by Keith Tierney following the assault, *(c)* how soon after the assault Keith Tierney's family were informed of his injuries, *(d)* what knowledge HMP Buckley Hall had at the time of this assault of assaults already received by Keith Tierney at other prisons, *(e)* what measures had been adopted at HMP Buckley Hall at the time of the assault and to minimise the risk of assault for Keith Tierney; [40982]

(4) if he will list the number and types of incidents reported to the Prison Service in relation to Buckley Hall since *(a)* 12 June 1996 and *(b)* 14 December 1994; [40974]

(5) what is the current staffing ratio for non-health staff to prisoners at *(a)* HMP Buckley Hall and *(b)* other male category C training prisons; [40978]

(6) if he will list the representatives of *(a)* overseas Governments and *(b)* ministries of justice that have visited HMP Buckley Hall since 14 December 1994; and on what dates the visits occurred. [40977]

(7) how many serious assaults have occurred on prisoners in HMP Buckley Hall since 14 December 1994; [40975]

(8) how many serious assaults have occurred on staff in HMP Buckley Hall since 16 July 1995; and what is the total number of assaults on staff that have occurred at the prison since 14 December 1994. [40979]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for replies to be given.

Letter from Hugh Taylor to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 16 October 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about Buckley Hall prison.

The information requested is not immediately available and the Director General will write to you in full as soon as possible.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason Recruitment and Assessment Services was asked to delay the processing of applicants for appointments to the board of the Criminal Cases Review Commission; on what date it was given clearance to proceed; and if he will make a statement. [41060]

Mr. Kirkhope: Recruitment and Assessment Services was not asked to delay the processing of applicants for the posts of members of the Criminal Cases Review Commission. It was unable to inform applicants about the outcome of their applications until all the applications had been considered and sifted. This process took longer than anticipated due to the large number of applications received. Preliminary interviews for the posts began on 3 September; the final interviews will be held during the next few weeks.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current budget for the Criminal Cases Review Commission; and how much has so far been spent. [41059]

Mr. Kirkhope: The provisional budget for setting up and operating the Criminal Cases Review Commission in 1996—97 is £5 million. Up to 30 September, £104,000 had been spent, although much more has been committed in terms of accommodation and equipment for the commission.

Ms. Sandra Gregory

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision exists to enable Ms Sandra Gregory, currently serving a 22—year sentence in Klong Prem womens' prison, Bangkok, to serve the rest of her sentence in a British prison. [40936]

Miss Widdecombe: I will write to the hon Member.

Doncaster Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to place a safety net in the open space between the first floor landing and the ground floor at Doncaster prison to prevent (a) self-harm by prisoners and (b) harm to prison staff by prisoners; and if he will make a statement; [40864]

(2) how many prisoners and from which of Her Majesty's prison establishments worked at Goodwood racecourse during its July meetings; how they were selected; if they were recompensed for the work; what was the total cost of the service; what proportion of this was borne by (a) the racecourse executive and (b) from public funds; and if he will make a statement; [40866]

(3) what is the (a) current number and (b) percentage of the current prison population at HMP Doncaster who have been imprisoned for (i) rape, (ii) murder, (iii) armed robbery, (iv) manslaughter and (v) arson; and what were the equivalent figures for 12 months ago; [40853]

(4) how may prisoners and from which of Her Majesty's prison establishments have worked at Doncaster racecourse during the last 12 months; how they were selected; if they were recompensed for the work; what was the total cost of the service; what proportion of this was borne by *(a)* the racecourse executive and *(b)* from public funds; and if he will make a statement; [40867]

(5) which trade unions are recognised by Premier Prison Services at Her Majesty's prison, Doncaster; and in respect of which issues the company is prepared to consult and negotiate with each trade union. [40854]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for replies to be given.

Letter from Hugh Taylor to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 16 October 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about Doncaster prison and prisoners working at Goodwood.

The information requested is not immediately available and the Director General will write to you in full as soon as possible.

Prisoners (Closed Visits)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are subject to closed visits; how long this policy has been in force; and how often it is reviewed. [40847]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Hugh Taylor to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 16 October 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent question about closed visits.

The information requested is not immediately available and the Director General will write to you in full as soon as possible.

Detainees

Mr. Richmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people detained in *(a)* Doncaster prison and *(b)* The Wolds prison under

Immigration Act powers were deported in each month from May to September; and what were the nationalities of those deported; [40871]

(2) how many people were detained in *(a)* Doncaster prison and *(b)* the Wolds prison, under Immigration Act powers, in each month from May to September; and what were the nationalities of those detained. [70870]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Hugh Taylor to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 16 October 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about people deported under Immigration Act powers.

The information requested is not immediately available and the Director General will write to you as soon as possible with a full reply.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many schools in South Yorkshire to date have applied for funding for closed circuit television; and what percentage of them were successful; [40865]

(2) how much money his Department contributed towards each project in South Yorkshire which was successful for closed circuit television this year and what percentage this was of the total cost of each project. [40993]

Mr. Maclean: I will write to the hon. Member.

New Buildings and Premises

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by his Department and its agencies; and if he will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41142]

Mr. Howard: I will write to the hon. Member.

Dassault Aviation

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the visit by police to the chalet of Dassault Aviation during the Farnborough air show. [40943]

Mr. Kirkhope: I will write to the hon. Member.

Traffic Division Operations

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been dedicated to traffic division operations in *(a)* Thames Valley, *(b)* Hertfordshire, *(c)* Essex, *(d)* Surrey and *(e)* Sussex in each of the last 10 years. [41194]

Mr. Maclean: I will write to the hon. Member.

James Hanratty Case

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he plans to take following receipt of the Scotland Yard report into the A6 James Hanratty murder case; and if he will make a statement. [41200]

Mr. Kirkhope: I will write to the hon. Member.

Stalking

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, column *523*, if he will now give details of the number of people prosecuted for stalking under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 as it related to crimes of intentional harassment. [41240]

Mr. Maclean: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to announce his conclusions in the light of responses to the consultation document "Stalking: The Solutions." [41275]

Mr. Maclean: I shall be making an announcement on Friday.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what capacity of electricity used in his Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans he has to increase that capacity. [41323]

Mr. Howard: I will write to the hon. Member.

London Fire and Civil Defence Authority

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has reached a decision on the application from the London fire and civil defence authority under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947. [41279]

Mr. Howard: I have approved proposals put to me by the London fire and civil defence authority for the removal of one of two pumping appliances at each of 14 fire stations in London, the removal of a fire rescue unit and a reduction in establishment of 316 posts. The pumping appliances are in the fire stations at Barnet, Chiswick, Deptford, East Greenwich, Fulham, Hendon, Millwall, Sidcup, Silvertown, Southwark, Twickenham, Wimbledon, Woodford and Woodside. I have rejected the proposal by the authority to remove one of the appliances from the fire station at Battersea on the grounds that I am not satisfied that adequate consideration has been given to the representations that have been made to the authority about the arrangements for dealing with special fire risks.

The primary responsibility for deciding what resources are needed to provide an efficient and effective fire service in London and how those resources should be deployed rests with the fire authority. In reaching a decision on its application, very careful consideration has been given to the representations that have been received. I have also sought the views of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services. I have accepted his firm professional advice that if those proposals which I have

now agreed are implemented by the fire authority, nationally recommended fire cover standards will still be maintained throughout London.

Ministry of Transport Certificates

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been in each of the last five years against private individuals or companies for forging their MOT certificates. [40351]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* The following table gives the readily available information:

Total number of proceedings for the offence of fraud, forgery etc. of test certificates, England and Wales, 1990–94

	Number
1990	638
1991	732
1992	676
1993	978
1994	1,803

Statistics for 1995 are due to be published at the end of October 1996.

Juries (Fraud Trials)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the use of juries in fraud trial cases; and if he will make a statement. [40553]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 15 October 1996]:* The Government are keeping the handling of long and complex fraud trials under close review in the light of changing circumstances and recent developments.

An examination of the role of the jury is one of the important issues which arises in this context and the Government are considering carefully the merits of any potential change.

Prison Releases

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure that prison release dates are calculated correctly; how many prisoners were recently wrongly released; how many reoffended or in other ways breached the conditions of their release; and if he will make a statement. [40560]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 15 October 1996]:* The Government had proposed in March that there should be new arrangements in England and Wales for determining the effect on release dates of time spent on remand. These proposals, set out in the White Paper "Protecting the Public" provide that in all cases the judge will determine, when passing sentence, how much remand time will count against the sentence.

Following the recent clarification of existing law by the High Court in the case of R *v.* Naughton, governors have been issued with fresh guidance stating that remand time in relation to consecutive sentences cannot be counted more than once.

Of the 541 prisoners serving consecutive sentences who were released early, figures for the period ending 11 October show that nine prisoners have been returned to prison either for breach of their licence or following commission of further offences, or both. Information about any prisoner who may have been arrested for alleged further offences and has not been remanded in custody is not available.

Witnesses (Cross-examination)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend the law as it applies to the cross-examination of prosecution witnesses in cases of alleged sexual assault and related areas; and if he will make a statement. [40550]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 15 October 1996]:* The Criminal Justice Act 1988 already prohibits a defendant from questioning a child witness in cases of sexual offences and cruelty. My right hon. and learned Friend announced on 8 October that he would like to see similar protection extended to protect victims of alleged sexual assault. A review is being undertaken to look at ways in which this might best be achieved.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people to date have lost their reduced earnings allowances in each of the benefit districts in Wales. [40465]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of reduced earnings allowance is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Ted Rowlands, dated 15 October 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary question asking how many people to date have lost their Reduced Earnings Allowances (REA) in each of the benefit districts in Wales.

I have assumed this question refers solely to Adjudication Officer's decisions to transfer over pensionable age (as at 24 March 1996) REA recipients to retirement Allowance following the coming into force of the Social Security (Industrial Injuries and Diseases) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1996 on 24 March 1996.

As at 31 August 1996, the number of people whose entitlement to REA has been transferred to Retirement Allowance by each District in Wales is detailed in the table below:—

Benefits agency district	*Number of cases transferred*
West Wales	242
Gwent Borders	57
Swansea Bay	266
Mid Glamorgan	690
Wrexham and North Wales	176
Cardiff and Vales	82
Gwyneddigion Maldwy	102
Eastern Valleys	335

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

I hope this reply will be helpful.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the additional costs of holding the appeals against the withdrawal of the reduced earnings allowance. [40462]

Mr. Evans: Assuming that approximately 25 per cent. of the reduced earnings allowance recipients transferred to retirement allowance following the introduction of amending legislation will appeal against the adjudication officer's decision, the total cost of the processing and holding the appeals is estimated to be in the region of £1 million.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of people who have suffered a reduction in the related earnings allowance with the introduction of the retirement allowance in the benefit offices covering *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Mexborough. [40836]

Mr. Burt: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 16 October 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what estimate he has made of the number of people who have suffered a reduction in the reduced earnings allowance with the introduction of the retirement allowance in the benefit offices covering (a) Doncaster and (b) Mexborough.

The information is not available in the format requested. This is because statistics are collected by Benefits Agnecy Districts and not by individual benefit offices. I have provided below the figures for Doncaster District which includes Doncaster Castle House and Doncaster St Peters House and Rother and Dearne District which includes Goldthorpe, Mexborough, Rotherham North, Rotherham South and Wathon Dearne. These figures are provisional and may be subject to amendment.

In order to assess these people who might be transferred to Retirement Allowance under amending legislation (Social Security (Industrial Injuries and Diseases) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1996) which came into force on 24 March 1996, the Benefits Agency identified all Reduced Earnings Allowance recipients over pensionable age as at 24 March 1996. As a result of assessing all those cases identified in the Doncaster and Rother and Dearne Districts the numbers whose benefit has been reduced are as follows:–

(a) Doncaster District: 291

(b) Rother and Dearne District: 349

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people covered by the Seaham and Peterlee Benefits Agency offices have had retirement allowance substituted for reduced earnings allowance. [41221]

Mr. Evans: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Appeals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the correspondence between his Department and the Council on Tribunals regarding the draft of the Social Security (Adjudication) and Child Support Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1996; [40594]

(2) if members of social security appeal tribunals, disability appeal tribunals and child support appeal tribunals will receive the documents relating to appeals in advance of the hearing in cases where an oral hearing is not requested; [40781]

(3) if he will ensure that, before the chairman of a tribunal gives notice for the determination forthwith of an appeal which he believes has no reasonable prospect of success, the appellant has been given an opportunity to request an oral hearing and any such request has been complied with; [40783]

(4) what assessment he has made of the percentage of successful appeals to a social security appeal tribunal if the appellant *(a)* requests and *(b)* does not request an oral hearing; [40786]

(5) if he will defer the coming into force of the Social Security (Adjudication) and Child Support Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1996 to allow time for a debate on the proposed changes in the rights of appellants; [40816]

(6) what assistance will be provided to ensure that appellants from tribunal decisions are able to comply with the requirement to include in their appeal a summary of the arguments relied on by them. [40782]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on 23 July, *Official Report*, column *299*.

We do not intend to postpone the introduction of these regulations. They are essential to allow for improvements to the service offered appellants and any delay in their coming into force will only delay the point at which improvements can be made. Copies of subsequent correspondence between departmental officials and the Council on Tribunals concerning these amendments have been placed in the Library.

The appeal leaflet is being re-written to tell appellants the type of information required to support their appeal. Staff of the relevant agencies and other advice agencies will continue to provide advice as they do now. The independent tribunal service will tell the appellant if the information given is insufficient.

The right to an oral hearing is not modified by the power of the chairman to determine the appeal forthwith. The appellant will be asked in all cases if he wants an oral hearing. Currently, success rates for those people who choose to attend their hearing are around 53 per cent. compared to 15 per cent. for those people who choose not to attend. I have made no assumption about whether these figures will change following the introduction of the requirement to opt for an oral hearing. An evaluation will be undertaken once the new procedures have been in place for a reasonable time. The requirement to opt for an oral hearing will enable the independent tribunal service arrange non-attended hearings more efficiently.

The issuing of documents to tribunal members about appeals is a question for the president of the independent tribunal service, His Honour Judge Bassingthwaighte, who will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Family Credit

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were in receipt of family credit in *(a)* York, *(b)* North Yorkshire and *(c)* Yorkshire and Humberside in 1988 and in each year since then. [40238]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of family credit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 15 October 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people were in receipt of Family Credit (FC) in York, North Yorkshire and Yorkshire and Humberside in 1988 and each year since then.

The information is not available in the format requested. This is because the FC computer system holds records of the total number of claims received, awarded and disallowed on a national basis. Details are not broken down into individual towns or areas.

However, statistics are available which indicate the number of families in receipt of FC within a Benefits Agency (BA) office area at a particular date. The information is only available from 1993 onwards as details relating to FC claims are normally destroyed after 18 months. The details available for each BA office in the Yorkshire and Humberside area, and the date of each scan, are shown in the attached Annex.

I hope that you find this reply useful. If you would like any further information regarding the Family Credit scheme please write to Miss J Geering, Customer Service Manager, Family Credit unit, Government Buildings, Cop Lane, Penwortham, Preston, PR1 OSA.

BA office	*28 May 1993*	*15 April 1994*	*13 April 1995*	*12 April 1996*
York	1,869	2,174	2,459	2,793
(North Yorkshire)				
Harrogate	965	1,049	1,197	1,391
Northallerton	858	1,005	1,085	1,289
Scarborough	1,252	1,417	1,618	1,794
Skipton	302	371	413	565
Total	3,377	3,842	4,313	5,039
(Yorkshire and Humberside)				
Barnsley (East)	1,178	1,362	1,464	1,289
Barnsley (West)	678	890	1,147	1,710
Bradford (East)	1,818	2,143	2,472	2,736
Bradford (South)	1,755	2,169	2,357	2,643
Bradford (West)	1,853	2,093	2,289	2,494
Castleford	658	830	969	891
Dewsbury	2,484	2,889	3,220	3,468
Doncaster (East)	1,229	1,366	1,483	1,709
Doncaster (West)	1,378	1,727	2,078	2,597
Goole	517	598	624	739
Grimsby	2,528	3,007	3,400	3,829
Halifax	2,408	2,690	2,931	3,160
Hemsworth	297	488	606	779
Huddersfield	2,015	2,331	2,620	2,969
Keighley	1,542	1,712	1,906	1,971
Leeds (East)	1,902	2,239	2,352	2,617
Leeds (North-west)	1,445	1,661	1,812	1,951
Leeds (North)	1,628	1,752	1,962	2,101
Leeds (South)	1,160	1,289	1,451	1,558
Leeds (West)	1,611	1,822	1,865	2,070
Rotherham (North)	647	703	742	619
Rotherham (South)	1,603	2,046	2,408	2,759
Scunthorpe	1,258	1,441	1,714	1,865
Sheffield (North-east)	1,354	1,593	1,731	2,135
Sheffield (North-west)	1,431	1,509	1,756	1,978
Sheffield (South-east)	993	1,117	1,266	1,505
Sheffield (South-west)	900	1,043	1,178	1,401
Wakefield	1,465	1,681	1,844	1,983
Wath On Dearne	515	684	921	1,119
Total	40,250	46,875	52,586	58,645

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of lone-parent families received family credit in each of the last 10 years. [41025]

Mr. Burt: The information is set out in the table.

Number of Family Credit Lone Parents

Year	*Number of cases*	*Percentage of lone parent population*
1986	83,000	9
1987	92,000	9
1988	74,000	7
1989	114,000	10
1990	122,000	10
1991	132,000	10
1992	160,000	11
1993	208,000	14
1994	236,000	15
1995	268,000	16

Notes:

1. Family Income Supplement data for 1986 and 1987 are as at April, Family Credit data from 1988 onwards are based on May.
2. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Sources:

Family Credit Statistics Quarterly Enquiry May 1996.
Social Security Statistics 1986–1987.
Lone Parent population data are based on DSS Estimates from General Household Survey.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of family credit in 1994–95; and how many people were in receipt of this benefit. [40143]

Mr. Evans: Expenditure on family credit in 1994–95 was £1,441 million. In March 1995, there were 602,000 families in receipt of the benefit.

Sources:

1. 1996 Departmental Report.
2. Family Credit 5 per cent. sample of awards at 31 March 1995.

Note:

Caseload figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the effect of the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance in regard to the cost of family credit. [40144]

Mr. Evans: In the long term, the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance is estimated to increase the cost of the family credit by up to £10 million. This figure does not include behavioural effects.

Source:

Family Credit Expenditure Survey data.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes have taken place in the number of recipients of family credit in each area of Yorkshire; and how those figures compare with the position one year earlier. [40147]

Mr. Evans: The administration of family credit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Peter Hardy, dated 16 October 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what changes have taken place in the number of recipients of Family Credit (FC) in each area of Yorkshire; and how those figures compare with the position one year earlier.

The information is not available in the format requested. This is because the FC computer system holds records of the total number of claims received, awarded and disallowed on a national basis. Details are not broken down into individual towns or areas.

However, statistics are available which indicate the number of families in receipt of FC within a Benefits Agency (BA) office are at a particular date. The details available for each BA office in the Yorkshire area, and the date of each scan, are shown in the attached Annex.

I hope that you find the information useful. If you would like any further information regarding the Family Credit scheme please write to Miss J Geering, Customer Service Manager, Family Credit Unit, Government Buildings, Cop Lane, Penwortham, Preston, PR1 0SA.

Benefit office	*Scan Date: 13 April 1995*	*12 April 1996*	*+/–*
Barnsley (East)	1,464	1,289	–175
Barnsley (West	1,147	1,710	+563
Bradford (East)	2,472	2,736	+264
Bradford (South)	2,375	2,643	+268
Bradford (West)	2,289	2,494	+205
Castleford	969	891	–78
Dewsbury	3,220	3,468	+248
Doncaster (East)	1,483	1,709	+226
Doncaster (West)	2,078	2,597	+519
Goole	624	739	+115
Grimsby	3,400	3,829	+429
Halifax	2,931	3,160	+229
Harrogate	1,197	1,391	+194
Hemsworth	606	779	+173
Huddersfield	2,620	2,969	+349
Keighley	1,906	1,971	+65
Leeds (East)	2,352	2,617	+265
Leeds (North-west)	1,812	1,951	+139
Leeds (North)	1,962	2,101	+139
Leeds (South)	1,451	1,558	+107
Leeds (West)	1,865	2,070	+205
Northallerton	1,085	1,289	+204
Rotherham (North)	742	619	–123
Rotherham (South)	2,408	2,759	+351
Scarborough	1,618	1,794	+176
Scunthorpe	1,714	1,865	+151
Sheffield (North-east)	1,731	2,135	+404
Sheffield (North-west)	1,756	1,978	+222
Sheffield (South-east)	1,266	1,505	+239
Sheffield (South-west)	1,178	1,401	+223
Skipton	413	565	+152
Wakefield	1,844	1,983	+139
Wath on Dearne	921	1,119	+198
York	2,459	2,793	+334
Total	59,358	66,477	+7,119

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of the population is in receipt of family credit in each region of the United Kingdom. [40146]

Mr. Evans: The available information is set out in the table.

This Department is responsible for social security in Great Britain and can therefore provide information only for England, Scotland and Wales.

I would therefore refer the hon. Member to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for figures for Northern Ireland.

Family credit cases and beneficiaries by social security administrative region

Region	*Number of cases*	*Number of beneficiaries*	*Beneficiaries as a percentage of population*
North Eastern	122,000	433,000	—
London North	81,000	298,000	—
London South	71,000	260,000	—
South Western	54,000	196,000	—
Midlands	121,000	440,000	—
North Western	106,000	374,000	—
England	553,000	2,000,000	4.1
Scotland	73,000	237,000	4.6
Wales	40,000	142,000	4.9
Great Britain/total	666,000	2,379,000	4.2

Sources:

1. Family Credit 5 per cent. sample of awards at 29 February 1996.
2. Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys.

Notes:

1. All figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. "Beneficiaries" include the Family Credit claimant, a partner if present, and any children or dependents included in the Family Credit assessment.
3. The population figures used for comparison are the mid-year estimates for 1994 which are the latest available. Resident populations for Social Security.
4. Administrative Regions are not available.

Benefits Freeline Advisory Service

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many calls were received by the benefits freeline advisory service in Wales in the last year; and how many came from the Rhymney Merthyr benefit districts. [40325]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Ted Rowlands, dated 16 October 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many calls were received by the Benefits Freeline Advisory Service in Wales in the last year; and how many came from the Rhymney Merthyr benefit districts.

The information is not available in the format requested. The number of calls received has been taken to mean the number of calls answered by an advisor. The Benefits Freeline Advisory Service in Wales reeeived 12,000 calls in the year April 1995 to March 1996. This figure has been rounded to the nearest 1,000. However no records have been kept indicating where calls originated from.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to respond to the Industrial Injuries Advisory Committee's report on chronic bronchitis and emphysema. [40714]

Mr. Roger Evans: No decision has yet been made with regard to the recommendations set out in the report, which is being given full and careful consideration. We will

announce the decision as soon as we have completed our necessarily detailed examination of the issues it raises.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list by region the number of claims that have been made for industrial injuries benefit in respect of chronic bronchitis and emphysema; how many have been successful; how many have been refused; and for what reasons. [40715]

Mr. Burt: The administration of industrial injuries disablement benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Paddy Tipping, dated 16 October 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will list by region the number of claims that have been made for Industrial Injuries Benefit in respect of chronic bronchitis and emphysema; how many have been successful; how many have been refused; and for what reasons.

The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is shown in the attached table. Statistics are not kept which are specific to regions, but are kept by Benefit Agency Area Directorate.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Chronic bronchitis and/or emphysema activity from 1 April 1996 to 31 August 1996 analysed by benefits agency area directorate

	Claims received	*Successful claims*	*Claims disallowed*	*Disallowed under:*			
				20 year rule[1]	*1—13 per cent.*[2]	*Fev(1) test*[3]	*x-ray*[4]
AD1 East London and Anglia	4	0	1	1	0	0	0
AD2 Chilterns	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
AD3 London south	3	1	7	5	0	2	0
AD4 West Country	5	2	4	1	0	0	3
AD5 Mercia	230	44	131	18	0	55	58
AD6 West Midlands	11	2	10	2	0	3	5
AD7 Wales	220	28	150	14	2	75	59
AD8 North west Coast	24	5	18	6	0	3	9
AD9 Greater Manchester	23	4	18	4	0	2	12
AD10 Yorkshire	232	53	291	17	0	128	146
AD11 Tyne Tees	83	6	57	6	0	31	20
AD12 West of Scotland	4	0	3	1	0	1	1
AD13 East of Scotland	28	3	40	7	0	14	19

The number of claims received includes claims that will not have been determined by 31 August 1996 and the number of successful and disallowed claims includes claims received before 1 April 1996.

[1] 20 year rule: these cases were disallowed because the customer had not worked underground for at least 20 years.

[2] Disablement 1–13 per cent. cases disallowed because Industrial Injuries benefit only becomes payable at 14 per cent. disablement and the customer had no other entitlements which, when added to the CB and E assessment, would result in an aggregated minimum 14 per cent. disablement.

[3] Customers failed the FEV (1) test: cases disallowed because the lung capacity test did not show that the customer's lung capacity was sufficiently restricted.

[4] Customers failed the x-ray test: cases disallowed because findings from the customer's x-rays(s) were not sufficiently conclusive in respect of dust retention.

Source:

Benefits Agency Central Data Unit. Based on 100 per cent. count and subject to amendment. NB: not all claims will have been decided by 31 August 1996.

Promotional Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department has spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotion and *(c)* hospitality in each of the last six years. [40615]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 25 April, *Official Report*, column *249*.

Unfortunately, there was a typographical error in the answer I gave relating to the total amount of expenditure on publicity for the year 1994–95.

The information is not available in the format requested as it is not possible to separate promotional activities from publicity undertaken. Such information as is available is in the lists.

TOTAL EXPENDITURE ON PUBLICITY

1990–91: £12,316,239

1991–92: £17,546,566

1992–93: £19,510,968

1993–94: £18,333,603

1994–95: £20,054,914

1995–96: £20,085,672

TOTAL EXPENDITURE ON HOSPITALITY

1990–91: £75,778

1991–92: £91,934

1992–93: £175,901

1993–94: £165,565

1994–95: £127,139

1995–96: £99,929

Figures are for expenditure by Departmental Headquarters, all Executive Agencies and Non-Departmental Public Bodies.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has for the privatisation of the Benefits Agency; and if he will make a statement. [41169]

Mr. Lilley: There are no proposals to privatise the Benefits Agency.

Involvement of the private sector in the Benefits Agency is part of a wider programme of change to reduce running costs and improve efficiency.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the estimated total annual saving to the Benefits Agency of the proposed closure of the advice offices in Morley, Rothwell and Otley on 31 December; [41167]

(2) what is his estimate of the numbers of people calling for information or advice at the Benefits Agency Office in Morley in each week of its operation; and how many of these he estimates will journey to Leeds for advice; [41159]

(3) what was the cost to his Department of setting up the benefits advice office in Morley; and what was the cost to the Benefits Agency of running the office in 1995–96. [41168]

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what representations he has received concerning the change programme in the Benefits Agency; and if he will make a statement; [41271]

(2) what plans he has to meet the Civil and Public Services Association to discuss the change programme of the Benefits Agency; and if he will make a statement. [41272]

Mr. Roger Evans: I will write to the hon. Members shortly.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the offices within his Department that have been closed in the *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Mexborough area for each of the last five years. [40856]

Mr. Burt: In the five years prior to August 1996, no offices were closed in the Doncaster and Mexborough area.

In August 1996 the Benefits Agency took occupation of a new building at Crossgate house, Wood street, Doncaster. While meeting the current future operational needs and the requirements of its customers, it enabled rationalisation of the overall DSS occupied estate in Doncaster. As a result four buildings occupied by, DSS in Doncaster were closed: St. Peters house, Castle house, Silver house medical examination centre and Arndale house medical adjudication centre.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he is yet in a position to report on the tenders submitted to him for the Benefit Agency's telephone interpreting service; and if he will make a statement. [40987]

Mr. Evans: A framework agreement has been negotiated with Language Line Ltd. for the provision of a telephone interpretation service to the Benefits Agency and other interested Government Departments. Unsuccessful tenderers were informed by letter dated 14 October 1996. Debriefs for the unsuccessful tenderers are currently being arranged with the first debrief organised for 7 November 1996.

BA Purchasing and Supply, which let the contract on behalf of the Department of Social Security, is confident that the successful tender will provide an improved service in terms of quality of interpretation.

Lone Parents

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total benefit expenditure on lone parents whose youngest child is over five years old. [41017]

Mr. Burt: Benefit expenditure on lone parents whose youngest child is over five years, for the main benefits paid to lone parents, has been estimated using departmental data and is set out in the table.

£ million

Year	*1995–96*
One parent benefit	209
Family credit	491
Child benefit	810
Housing and council tax benefits	1,950
Income support	1,881
Total benefit	5,341

Source:
Family Resources Survey and various Analytical Services Division sample data.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the benefit bill for *(a)* income support, *(b)* family credit, *(c)* housing benefit, *(d)* council tax benefit, *(e)* one parent benefit and *(f)* lone-parent premium for lone parents by English region. [41027]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available in the tables.

Information for 1995–96 for *(a)*, *(c)* and *(d)* is shown in table 1 and for *(b)* is shown in table 2.

Expenditure by region for one-parent benefit and lone parent premium is not available.

Components of a benefit award cannot be separately identified. The lone-parent premium is payable with income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit. The income support lone-parent premium was worth £5.20 in April 1995. This would give implied expenditure in England for 1995–96 of £243 million for income support.

The equivalent amounts for housing benefit and council tax benefit, excluding income support recipients, are £61 million and £57 million.

However, some recipients will receive an overall amount of benefit which is less than the value of the premium.

Table 1

Region	*Income support*	*Housing benefit*	*Council tax benefit*
East Anglia	116	65	10
East Midlands	260	130	25
North	247	126	25
North West	569	295	58
South East	1,416	983	132
South West	274	169	26
West Midlands	381	186	33
Yorkshire and Humberside	352	166	32
All regions	3,614	2,119	342

Table 2

Region	*Family credit*
North Eastern	143
London North	78
Wales and South Western	100
Midlands	130
North Western	132
London South	74
All regions	657

Notes:

1. Information on income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit is provided by standard statistical region. Information on family credit is only available by social security administrative region.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest £ million.

Sources:

1. Total expenditure figures are consistent with the 1996 Departmental Report.
2. Housing benefit and council tax benefit figures are estimates derived from the annual 1 per cent. housing benefit sample enquiry.
3. Income support figures are estimates derived from the income support statistical enquiry May 1995 (5 per cent. sample). Family credit figures are derived from the family credit statistical sample (5 per cent. sample). Expenditure has been calculated from average weekly payments and Number of claimants.
4. A recent costing suggests that relatively few lone parents receive benefit less than the value of the premium.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the definition of availability for work for lone parents. [41015]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Lone parents with children aged under 16 may receive income support without being required to be available for work. However, they have full access to Employment Service advice and assistance if they wish to seek work. Lone parents if they choose may claim jobseeker's allowance at any time, rather than income support, but once their youngest child is aged 16 or over they may claim only jobseeker's allowance and must be available for work.

Lone parents who claim JSA must be willing and able to accept a job offer given 48 hours' notice. They may restrict their availability for employment provided that they are available for the maximum hours that their responsibility for the care of their children allows; that they retain reasonable prospects of securing employment despite their restrictions; and that they are available for a minimum of 16 hours a week.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of lone-parent families received income support in each of the last 10 years. [41021]

Mr. Burt: The information requested is set out in the table:

Number of Income Support Lone Parents

Year	*Number of cases*	*Percentage of lone parent population*
1986	575,000	62
1987	629,000	64
1988	694,000	66
1989	756,000	67
1990	793,000	65
1991	871,000	66
1992	957,000	68
1993	1,013,000	68
1994	1,039,000	66
1995	1,056,000	64

Notes:

1. Lone parents are defined as those receiving the lone parent premium.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Sources:

1. Supplementary Benefit/Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiries 1986–93.
2. Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiries May 1994 and May 1995.
3. Lone Parent population data are based on DSS estimates from General Household Survey.

Miss Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total benefit expenditure on lone parents in each of the last 10 years; and what it is estimated to be in the current year. [41022]

Mr. Burt: The information is set out in the table.

£ million

Year	*Lone parents*
1986–87	2,659
1987–88	2,972
1988–89	3,542
1989–90	3,961
1990–91	4,680
1991–92	5,728
1992–93	7,107
1993–94	8,124
1994–95	8,884
1994–95	9,510
1995–96	9,871

Source:

March 1996 Departmental Report and earlier equivalents.

Notes:

1. Outturn figures from 1986–87 to 1994–95, estimated outturn for 1995–96 and planned figure for 1996–97.
2. Expenditure is classified by beneficiary group according to the main reason a benefit is paid.
3. The benefits included in lone parent expenditure are:
   Child Benefit; One Parent Benefit; Family Credit/Family Income Supplement, Housing Benefit and Council Tax/Community Charge Benefit.

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been *(a)* the cost to date to the Benefits Agency of administering the habitual residence test to claimants for income support and *(b)* the cost to the Benefits Agency of preparing and presenting evidence for social security appeals tribunal hearings on the habitual residence test. [41032]

Mr. Burt: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Robin Corbett, dated 16 October 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what has been the cost to the Benefits Agency to date of administering the habitual residence test to claimants for Income Support (IS), and of preparing and presenting evidence at appeals tribunals on the test.

The information is not available in the format requested. The cost of administering the habitual residence test in District Offices, including the preparation and presentation of appeals, for the period 1 August 1994 when it was introduced to 31 March 1996, the latest date for which figures are available, is as follows:

1.8.94–31.3.95: £2,558.256

1.4.95–31.3.96: £2,612,051

It is not possible to separate the cost of the work associated with the preparing and presenting of evidence at appeals tribunals. This information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the number of appeals heard after claimants have failed to meet the habitual residence test when applying for income support by tribunal centres by name, giving the numbers decided in the claimants' favour. [41033]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of claimants tested and the number refused income support under the habitual residence test in each office site serving the Birmingham, Erdington constituency grouped according to United Kingdom nationals, European Economic Area nationals, or other nationals, for 1995–96 and for that period of 1996–97 for which figures are available. [41031]

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Robin Corbett, dated 16 October 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will list the number of claimants tested and the number refused Income Support (IS) under the habitual residence test in each office site serving the Birmingham, Erdington constituency grouped according to United Kingdom nationals, EEA nationals, or other nationals for 1995–96 and for that period of 1996–97 for which figures are available.

The information is not available in the format requested. This is because statistics are collected by Benefits Agency Districts and not by individual benefit offices. I have provided below the figures for Birmingham Tame Valley District, which covers the area of Birmingham Erdington, Birmingham Handsworth, Birmingham Perry Barr and Birmingham Washwood Heath. These figures are provisional and may be subject to amendment.

	Tested	*Failed*
UK nationals		
1995–96	876	98
April 1996 to August 1996	430	70
EEA nationals		
1995–96	17	8
April 1996 to August 1996	7	5
Other nationals		
1995–96	250	43
April 1996 to August 1996	100	29

This statistical data is lodged monthly in the House of Commons Library.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the total revenue collected for each year of operation of *(a)* Doncaster Child Support Agency field office and *(b)* Rotherham Child Support Agency field office for postal code area S64; and if he will indicate for *(a)* and *(b)* the (i) total running cost budget, (ii) total number of claims received and (iii) total number of (1) casual and (2) temporary staff employed. [40890]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr Martin Redmond, dated 16 October 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Doncaster and Rotherham Child Support Agency Offices.

As Field offices do not collect revenue, I am not able to provide you with any information. The assessment and subsequent collection of a maintenance is undertaken by the Child Support Agency Centres (CSACs). Once in a CSAC, it is not possible to attribute an individual case's yield to the field office at which it originated.

Since the inception of the Agency there have been several boundary changes within the Doncaster and Rotherham areas with both offices at some time being linked to others. In view of this, it is not possible to report on the running costs for these individual sites for either 1993/94 or 1994/95. This is also the case for details relating to both casual and temporary staff numbers.

In 1995/96, Doncaster and Rotherham because a combined area. For this year the running costs were £490,508 for staff and £14,415 for non staff. During the year the number of casual and fixed term contract employees fluctuated; on average one casual and one fixed term contract employee were employed. The number of claims received in the area was 5147.

In 1996/97, the staff costs are £474,279. There is no specific devolved budget for non staff costs in the current financial year as funds are allocated on a Divisional basis. The expenditure to date for the area is £10,181. There is currently one member of staff employed in the Doncaster/Rotherham area on a casual basis and there are three officers employed on fixed term contracts. The number of claims received in the current year (from April to September) is 2231.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the service availability of the Child Support Agency computer system in each week since 7 January. [40959]

Mr. Mitchell: The information is in the table:

Week ending	*Service availability (percentage)*
7 January 1996	99.9
14 January 1996	98.5
21 January 1996	98.8
28 January 1996	92.9
4 February 1996	99.7
11 February 1996	99.7
18 February 1996	95.5
25 February 1996	98.4
3 March 1996	100.0
10 March 1996	90.3
17 March 1996	100.0
24 March 1996	98.4
31 March 1996	98.6
7 April 1996	95.9
14 April 1996	97.6
21 April 1996	100.0
28 April 1996	99.9
5 May 1996	94.5
12 May 1996	99.2
19 May 1996	100.0
26 May 1996	99.9
2 June 1996	99.7
9 June 1996	99.8
16 June 1996	99.6
23 June 1996	89.6
30 June 1996	99.9
7 July 1996	98.8
14 July 1996	100.0
21 July 1996	100.0
28 July 1996	100.0
4 August 1996	74.4
11 August 1996	100.0
18 August 1996	98.6
25 August 1996	99.8
1 September 1996	88.8
8 September 1996	98.6
15 September 1996	98.6
22 September 1996	99.9
29 September 1996	100.0
6 October 1996	99.3

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes have been introduced or are in the process of being implemented as to grade and level of training for civil servants carrying out good cause interviews. [40973]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 16 October 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency Good Cause process.

Following the Government's acceptance of the Social Security Select Committee's recommendation that there should be a review of the Good Cause process, the Child Support Agency produced the Good Cause Report on 2 April 1996 which included 24 recommendations.

The Government has accepted all 24 recommendations which included the training and grading requirements as appropriate, for staff involved in the revised Good Cause process.

Action to implement these recommendations is well under way.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what procedures will exist to ensure that the opening and sorting of Child Support Agency post by Royal Mail staff will not lead to breaches of confidentiality; and what assessment he has made of the extent to which individual letters have to be read by Royal Mail staff to be effectively sorted. [40985]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 16 October 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency post opening arrangements.

Following a feasibility study carried out last year, the Agency decided to contract out its post opening requirements to the Royal Mail.

Client confidentiality is of the utmost importance to the Agency, and was an important consideration in taking this decision. The Agency ran a pilot exercise to test procedures, and issues such as security and client confidentiality.

In providing a sorting service to the Agency, Royal Mail are required merely to scan items of mail to ascertain their correct destination point. This is identical to the procedure previously undertaken by Agency staff. The volumes involved and the large scale use of machinery in the process makes the reading of individual letters and forms an impractical proposition. In addition, all Royal Mail staff are required to sign the Official Secrets Act: just as staff employed by the Child Support Agency.

I hope this is helpful.

Pensioners

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what ways his Department takes account of the needs of pensioner households mainly dependent on benefits when uprating the old age pension. [41009]

Mr. Burt: Current legislation provides for the annual uprating of the state pension in line with the rise in prices. In this way, we have maintained the value of the state pension to provide a solid foundation for retirement at a time of strong pressure on public spending.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners were solely dependent on their old age pension and means-tested benefits in each of the last five years. [41000]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

The table shows estimates of the number and proportion of pensioner couples, single pensioners and all pensioner units who are solely dependent upon income from state retirement pension and income-related benefits.

Pensioner units	1989	1990	1990–91	1992	1993
Single pensioners	790,000 (18 per cent.)	740,000 (17 per cent.)	700,000 (16 per cent.)	670,000 (15 per cent.)	500,000 (11 per cent.)
Pensioner couples	80,000 (3 per cent.)	180,000 (7 per cent.)	150,000 (6 per cent.)	140,000 (5 per cent.	120,000 (4 per cent.)
All pensioner units	880,000 (13 per cent.)	920,000 (13 per cent.)	860,000 (12 per cent.)	800,000 (11 per cent.)	610,000 (9 per cent.)

Source:
The Pensioners' Incomes Series (based upon data from the Family Expenditure Surveys).
Notes:
1. Income-related benefits include housing benefit, income support and benefits to pay for local taxes (i.e. rate rebate, community charge benefit and council tax benefit). The Christmas bonus has also been included.
2. All estimates of numbers are shown to the nearest 10,000 pensioner units. A pensioner unit is defined as being either a single person aged over state pension age, or a couple where the head, or husband, is aged over SPA. Percentage estimates are shown to the nearest whole percentile.
3. The Pensioners Income Series gives single calendar estimates. However in 1991 one quarter of the family expenditure survey sample was omitted because of problems following the delayed issue of community charge bills in April 1991. As a result the sample size in that year it too small to provide sufficiently reliable estimates of pensioners' incomes. For this reason the remaining data for 1991 have combined with that for 1990 to produce estimates for the combined calendar years 1990 and 1991.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently in receipt of incapacity benefit; and at what total annual cost. [40848]

Mr. Lilley: At 31 May 1996, the latest date for which figures are available, 1.8 million people were in receipt of incapacity benefit.[1] The estimated cost for the year 1995–96 is £8,120 million.[2]

Sources:
1. 5 per cent. sample from the incapacity benefit computer system. Excludes a small number of cases not on the system.
2. Social Security Departmental Report (March 1996).

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeals have been lodged against a disallowance of incapacity benefit in the benefits districts covering *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Mexborough in each quarter since April 1995; how many of these have been from (i) new incapacity benefit claimants and (ii) former claimants of invalidity benefit; in each case, how many appeals have been *(x)* disallowed, *(y)* superseded and *(z)* found in the claimants' favour; and how many are outstanding. [40837]

Mr. Burt: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people disallowed incapacity benefit have successfully made claims to unemployment benefits or credits of national insurance in the Employment Service in *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Mexborough districts in each quarter since April 1995. [40841]

Mr. Lilley: The available information is in the tables.

Doncaster offices of the Employment Service

Quarter ending	Number of claims for unemployment benefits/National Insurance credits at Employment Service office by people found capable of work under the all work test
June 1995	3
September 1995	19
December 1995	30

Doncaster offices of the Employment Service

Quarter ending	Number of claims for unemployment benefits/National Insurance credits at Employment Service office by people found capable of work under the all work test
March 1996	67
June 1996	108
September 1996	75

Mexborough offices of the Employment Service.

Quarter ending	Number of claims for unemployment benefits/National Insurance credits at Employment Service office by people found capable of work under the all work test
June 1995	2
September 1995	92
December 1995	73
March 1996	68
June 1996	139
September 1996	140

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41187]

Mr. Burt: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have undergone the all-work test for incapacity benefit; what were the results of the tests; and how many are now employed.[40843]

Mr. Lilley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

	April 1995 to August 1996
Number of assessments under the all work test	1,059,000
Allowed benefit following reference to BA Medical Services on the all work test	892,000
Disallowed benefit following reference to BA Medical Services on the all work test	167,000

Source:
Monthly scan of the incapacity benefit computer system.
Note:
All information is provisional and could be subject to change.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* total number of recipients and *(b)* average benefit paid in respect of (i) invalidity benefit for 1994–95 and (ii) incapacity benefit for 1995–96.[40844]

Mr. Lilley: The available information is in the table.

	Number of recipients	Average weekly amount in payment (£)
Invalidity Benefit at 12 April 1995	1,767,000	84.77
Incapacity Benefit [1] at 31 May 1996	1,677,000	[2]85.54

Source:
Invalidity Benefit figures taken from a 1 per cent. sample of cases. Incapacity Benefit figures taken from a 5 per cent. sample of cases from the Incapacity Benefit computer system. These figures exclude a small number of cases not on the system.
Notes:
[1] Excludes recipients of the short term (lower) rate, the equivalent of Sickness Benefit prior to 13 April 1995.
[2] Includes those cases where benefit is in payment at the pre-April 1995 Invalidity Benefit rate (uprated) under the transitional protection rules.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average administration cost of the incapacity benefit per applicant since its inception.[40846]

Mr. Lilley: The information requested is not yet available.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the success rate for appeals relating to the all-work test in the December 1995 and March 1996 quarters *(a)* where the appellant was present or represented at the tribunal hearing and *(b)* where the appellant was neither present nor represented. [40785]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

	Percentage of appeals revised in favour of appellant following tribunal hearing
Appellant present or represented	57
Appellant neither present nor represented	7

Note:
Figures are for December 1995.
Source:
100 per cent. count of all appeals and referrals which have been registered with the Independent Tribunal Service.

Income Support

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the percentage level of income support payments that met the target for accuracy in 1991–92 and 1995–96; what are the reasons for variations; and by what date he expects the target for the accuracy of income support payments to be met. [40986]

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 16 October 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what was the percentage level of Income Support (IS) payments that met the target for accuracy in 1991–92 and 1995–96; what are the reasons for variations; and by what date he expects the target for the accuracy of income support payments to be met.

I have provided below the figures for accuracy, including the target set by the Secretary of State and the Benefits Agency achievement for IS for 1991/92 and 1995/96. I should explain that in 1991/92 district staff were responsible for checking and reporting the accuracy for IS. The figures quoted were based on a limited case check carried out on the most recent action on the case. In 1995/96 the target and accuracy figures were based on a full case check involving all aspects of the award. This, in part, accounts for the variation in figures.

The Benefits Agency is committed to improve its accuracy rate and meet the Secretary of State's target. However IS is a complex benefit. For example, on average each IS case needs to be reviewed 4 times per year. Sustained effort over a period of years will be required before a significant and lasting improvement can be achieved. The Agency has a programme of measures designed to bring about improvements in accuracy in the short term and is also undertaking a fundamental review of IS processes and its computer systems. The aim of the review is to improve accuracy, security and efficiency, thereby working towards paying benefit accurately at the outset.

IS—accuracy target and achievement

Percentage

	1991–92	1995–96
Secretary of State's target	94.00	87.00
Agency figure	95.7	78.01

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Performance Targets

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the performance targets for each social security office in the county of South Yorkshire for *(a)* 1995–1996 and *(b)* 1996–97; and how many of these targets were achieved in 1995–96 in each case indicating how these targets and achievements relate to those set nationally. [40829]

Mr. Roger Evans: I will write to the hon Member shortly.

Child Care Disregard

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families now claim the child care disregard. [41018]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested as information on claims is not available. The latest information on the number of awards where the childcare disregard has resulted in extra benefit payment is in the table:

Benefit	*[1]Numbers benefitting from childcare disregard*
Family Credit[2]	25,000
Disability Working Allowance[3]	99
Housing Benefit[4]	4000
Council Tax Benefit[4]	5000

Notes:

[1] All figures are rounded to the nearest thousand except Disability Working Allowance which is an exact figure. Numbers exclude cases where maximum benefit is already payable before the childcare disregard.

[2] Family Credit figures as at 31 May 1996.

[3] Disability Working Allowance figures as at 30 April 1996.

[4] Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit as at 31 May 1995.

Sources:

1. Family Credit Statistics Quarterly Enquiry (5 per cent. sample).
2. Disability Working Allowance 100 per cent. count of all claims.
3. Housing Benefit Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample enquiry for those not in receipt of Income Support taken at the end of May 1995.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the Government's original estimate of the number of families who would be eligible for the child care disregard. [40892]

Mr. Mitchell: The original estimate was that, in the long term, 150,000 families would benefit from the child care disregard.

Executive Agency Staff

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of staff employed by his Department's *(a)* Benefits Agency, *(b)* Contributions Agency, *(c)* Information Technology Service Agency, *(d)* Child Support Agency, *(e)* War Pensions Agency and *(f)* other agencies in (i) Doncaster and (ii) Mexborough areas for each of the last five years. [40891]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table:

	Doncaster	*Mexborough*
Benefits agency	349	29
Contributions agency	29	0
Information technology services agency	0	0
Child support agency	20	0
War pensions agency	0	0
Total	398	29

Notes:

1. The figures are represented as staff in post figures and include permanent and fixed term appointment staff as at 31 March 1996. Casual staff are excluded.
2. Figures for previous years are not available.
3. The sites covered by the reply are Doncaster Crossgates House and Mexborough Crown Buildings.

National Insurance Records

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on how many occasions in the last 10 years national insurance records have been mislaid; what back-up system was available in each case; and how secure is the current computer system. [40842]

Mr. Burt: There have been no instances of loss of registered national insurance records within the last 10 years. The back-up system consists of holding two copies of records within the computer installation and one copy remotely for added security. The computer system is regarded as very secure in protecting records and has a sophisticated series of computer program checks to detect corruption and loss of personal data.

New Buildings and Premises

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by his Department and its agencies; and if he will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41138]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

£ million

Year	*Maintenance*	*Accommodation capital*	*Total*
1995–96	36.6	89.3	125.9
1994–95	32.1	89.1	121.1
1993–94	28.3	97.1	125.3
1992–93	39.4	113.3	152.8
1991–92	32.9	127.6	160.5

Information required regarding the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Benefits

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of state for Social Security what has been the total value of in-work benefits paid for each year since 1990–91; and if he will break down these figures for each year by family credit, housing benefit, income support, council tax benefit and disability working allowance. [40901]

Mr. Roger Evans: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the benefit bill for *(a)* income support, *(b)* family credit, *(c)* housing benefit, *(d)* council tax benefit, *(e)* one-parent benefit and *(f)* lone-parent premium for lone parents (i) in the last year for which figures are available and (ii) in each of the last five years. [41026]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Information for *(a)* to *(e)* is shown in the table 1. Expenditure on the lone–parent premium (f) is not available in the format requested. Components of a benefit award cannot be separately identified. Lone-parent premium is payable with income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit. The lone-parent premium has varied since in April 1990. The rate of premium would give implied expenditure in Great Britain as shown in the table 2. However, some recipients will receive an overall amount of benefit which is less than the value of the premium.

Table 1: Benefit expenditure on lone parents

£ million

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Income support *(a)*	2,286	2,860	3,448	3,735	4,051	4,201
Family credit *(b)*	183	220	379	558	657	776
Housing benefit *(c)*	906	1,253	1,656	2,002	2,208	2,418
Council tax benefit *(d)*	275	178	223	306	349	381
One parent benefit *(e)*	229	249	275	282	289	312

Source:

Total expenditure figures are consistent with the 1996 Departmental Report. Figures are rounded to the nearest £ million.

Table 2: Lone parent premium

£ million

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Income support (a)	169	202	236	258	276	285
Housing benefit (c)	30	37	44	54	63	75
CCB/council tax benefit (d)	46	45	45	47	57	68

Notes:

1. The above estimates are based on sample data and are not entirely consistent with Departmental Report figures.
2. Council tax benefit replaced community charge benefit in April 1993.

Social Fund

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applicants were refused a social fund loan on the grounds of inability to pay in 1995–96. [41291]

Mr. Roger Evans: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what capacity of electricity used in his Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans he has to increase that capacity. [41314]

Mr. Burt: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Sick Pay

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to go ahead with that proposal to free employers from operating statutory sick pay rules where they pay more generous wages or occupational sick pay. [41276]

Mr. Lilley: I will be laying regulations later in the year which will free employers from the obligation to make SSP calculations where they pay contractual remuneration as good as or better than SSP for a period of incapacity for work. Around 900 copies of the consultation paper "Exempting Employers from Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)" were sent to employers, their organisations, employees' organisations and other interested parties and I am grateful to all those who responded. I am placing a copy of the responses in the Library. The majority view was that the new arrangements would be a useful easement. The change, which will take effect from April 1997, will allow greater flexibility to employers and cut back on administration. Employees' underlying entitlement to SSP will not be affected.

Disabled People (Water)

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what financial assistance is available to the severely disabled and their carers who use water meters, and because of their disability or medical condition, have to use large quantities of water. [41281]

Mr. Burt: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Fraud Hotline

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost, by *(a)* county and *(b)* parliamentary constituency of publicising the fraud hotline; and what was the number of responses *(a)* by county and *(b)* by parliamentary constituency. [41327]

Mr. Heald: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many answers to *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by his Department in each of the past two years. [40641]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

Session	*Total number of questions*	*Corrections to written questions*	*Corrections to oral questions*
1994–95	2,750	20	0
1995–96	2,808	12	2

Note:

Figures as at 15 October 1996.

Source:

Departmental Archive.

Child Benefit

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in respect of how many *(a)* 16-year-olds and *(b)* 17-year-olds child benefit was paid in the first week of January for each year since 1985. [40760]

Mr. Burt: The information is set out in the table.

Year	Children 16-year-olds	17-year-olds
1984	531	292
1985	517	291
1986	513	287
1987	521	289
1988	520	317
1989	493	324
1990	490	329
1991	505	358
1992	517	373
1993	514	387
1994	535	386
1995	576	400

1. Figures represent the number of children for whom child benefit was paid as at 31 December in each year.
2. The figures for 1984 to 1993 are based on a 4 per cent. sample. 1994 and 1995 are based on a 1 per cent. sample. Figures include late notifications received up to and including 31 March of the following year.
3. Figures including children in Great Britain and overseas.

HEALTH

Yorkshire Regional Health Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who was the relevant regional general manager prior to Mr. McClean's appointment to the Yorkshire regional health authority; and who authorised the provision of a free private use car to Mr. McClean's predecessor. [40118]

Mr. Malone: The predecessor of Mr. McClean was Mr. A. W. Foster. Authorisation for the arrangements concerning the use of Mr. Foster's car was given by the director of personnel of the regional health authority.

Blood Transfusion Services

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase co-operation between the national blood transfusion service and the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service; and if he will make a statement. [40774]

Mr. Horam: The National Blood Authority and the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service are responsible respectively for blood services in England and in Scotland. They co-operate with each other as necessary in providing those services.

Lead

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the Government's current recommended safety levels for lead *(a)* in air and *(b)* in blood for (i) children, (ii) young people aged 16 to 18 years, (iii) women of child-bearing age, (iv) pregnant women and (v) men. [41120]

Mr. Horam: The current ambient air quality standard for lead is 2 microgrammes per cubic metre as an annual average.

There is no blood lead level that is considered completely safe although there is no clear evidence of harm at level below 10 microgrammes per decilitre of blood. It is for this reason that the policy of successive Governments has been to reduce exposure to lead, from all sources, whenever reasonably practical. Measures taken to date have produced a very substantial fall in blood lead levels in the past two decades as shown by various surveys including the health survey for England.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average level of lead in the blood of *(a)* children, *(b)* young people aged 16 to 18 years *(c)* women of child bearing age, *(d)* pregnant-women and *(e)* men in the United Kingdom. [41121]

Mr. Horam: A major blood lead monitoring programme was carried out as part of the health survey for England. The initial findings show a significant fall in blood lead concentrations. The median blood lead concentrations for men, women, and boys and girls aged 11 to 15 years, were 3.6, 2.6, 2.2 and 1.7 microgrammes per decilitre respectively. Results from this survey were published in a letter in the 5 October edition of the *British Medical Journal.*

Fostering Allowance

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the fostering allowance payable in each local authority area. [40827]

Mr. Burns: This information is not collected centrally.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the health service projects in South Yorkshire in respect of which *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful efforts have been made to pursue funding under the private finance initiative since 1 January 1995. [40996]

Mr. Horam: Two projects valued at more than £1 million have received approval under the private finance initiative in South Yorkshire since 1 January 1995. They are: Rotherham General Hospitals national health service trust—concourse development value £1.1 million; Rotherham General Hospitals national health service trust; clinical waste incinerator, value £3.4 million.

Information on unsuccessful schemes and lower value schemes is not held centrally.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has collated regarding expenditure incurred by each health authority and NHS hospital trust in South Yorkshire in unsuccessfully pursuing funding for projects through the private finance initiative since 1 January 1995; and if he will make a statement. [40997]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) on 17 July, *Official Report*, column *562*.

Further information is not available centrally.

Health Service Staff Dismissals

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the number of (i) medical, (ii) dental and (iii) nursing staff suspended or dismissed in the Trent region for each year since 1 January 1993 and *(b)* the number of staff in each category heard by disciplinary hearing who were not so suspended or dismissed in this period. [40928]

Mr. Horam: National health service bodies are separate, autonomous employers and the decision on whether an employee's conduct warrants disciplinary action, and its severity, is a matter for the health authority or trust concerned. Information collected centrally from national health service employers is the number of suspensions of hospital and community medical and hospital dental staff lasting more than six months since 31 March 1995. The number of reported cases in the Trent region from 31 March 1995 to 30 June 1996 is two.

New Buildings and Premises

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by his Department and its agencies; and if he will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41143]

Mr. Horam: From 1 April 1996, the Department of Health took over responsibility for its buildings from Property Holdings. The area of buildings leased by Property Holdings in the last five years which are now the responsibility of the Department of Health and its agencies is 21,400 sq m—1992–93—and 850 sq m—1995–96.

Expenditure on new buildings and premises is not separately recorded from other building-related costs.

Abortion

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce legislation to ban the use of partial birth abortion in late pregnancy; and if he will make a statement. [40954]

Mr. Horam: We are not aware of this procedure being used in the United Kingdom. Methods of abortion are a matter of clinical judgment.

Adoption

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many children were placed for adoption with their existing foster carers in every year since 1987 giving *(a)* the age of the children and *(b)* the length of time in foster care prior to adoption; [40960]

(2) if he will list the number of adoption breakdowns in each year since 1974, indicating the *(a)* ages of children and *(b)* length of time in adoptive family. [40942]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not held centrally.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of children in care and looked after by local authorities who were placed for adoption in every year since 1987, broken down by age. [40953]

Mr. Burns: The information requested, as at 31 March in each of the years to 31 March 1991, was published annually in "Children in Care of Local Authorities in England". Figures for the period from 1992 to 1994 were published annually in "Children Looked After by Local Authorities, England". Figures for the year ending 31 March 1995 were published in the statistical bulletin "Children looked after by local authorities: year ending 31 March 1995, England". Copies of all of these publications are available in the Library.

Joint Ventures

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many joint ventures are currently established between the NHS and the private sector in hospitals covering the Trent region; and if he will list each project indicating the hospital involved. [40994]

Mr. Horam: Four private finance initiative schemes over the value of £1 million have been approved in the Trent region. The trusts and schemes approved by the national health service executive are as follows:

NHS body	*Scheme*
Rotherham general hospital	Concourse development
Rotherham general hospital	Clinical waste incinerator
Nottingham ambulance service	Radio replacement scheme
Leicester mental health services NHS trust (trust HQ)	Office accommodation

Dedicated Case Managers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to collate centrally information on the locations of dedicated case managers for *(a)* head injury, *(b)* cancer and *(c)* fertility patients; and if he will make a statement. [40834]

Mr. Horam: No.

Beta Blocking Drugs

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 July, *Official Report*, column *386*, about the cost per patient per month of beta blocking drugs, in what form the information is available. [40989]

Mr. Malone: The net ingredient cost per prescription item dispensed for beta blockers in England for 1995 was £5.81. Most repeat prescriptions will be for one to three months.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current percentage of patients in the Doncaster health authority who are covered by general practitioner fundholders. [40855]

Mr. Malone: Some 64 per cent. of the population of Doncaster health authority is currently served by a general practitioner fundholding practice.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent by the Doncaster health authority in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1994–95 on (i) tendering for services

and (ii) administering the general practitioner fundholding scheme; and what were the comparable figures for the previous financial year. [40925]

Mr. Malone: Information is not collected centrally in the form requested.

Waiting Times

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the median waiting periods *(a)* currently and *(b)* in each of the last two years for patients needing (i) hip replacements and (ii) cataract treatment at each hospital in the Trent region where the operation is provided. [40924]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), on 23 July, *Official Report*, column *225*.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on hospital waiting times in Leeds. [41287]

Mr. Horam: Waiting times for in-patient and day case treatment in Leeds have improved considerably over the last year. Latest published figures show that only 51 patients out of 16,268 were waiting more than a year for treatment at the two main hospitals in Leeds this March compared with 675 out of 13,492 last March. Along with the rest of the country, Leeds hospitals are working towards achieving the patients charter standards for the first out-patient appointments so that everyone is seen within 26 weeks of referral by their general practitioner, with nine out of 10 patients seen within 13 weeks.

Children's Services

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what re-assessment has been made of the calculations of the standard spending assessment for children's services for the financial year 1997–98; what was the assessed figure for the London borough of Newham for the year 1996–97 and that for 1997–98 under this assessment. [40839]

Mr. Burns: For 1996–97, the standard spending assessment—SSA—for children's social services for the London borough of Newham is £27.191 million. The Government's proposals for 1997–98 SSAs are expected to be issued for consultation shortly after the Budget.

Anti-psychotic Drugs

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, (1) pursuant to his answer of 23 July, *Official Report*, column *216*, if he will list the research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the likelihood of developing tardive dyskinesia as a result of taking anti-psychotic drugs and ascertaining whether tardive dyskinesia is an irreversible condition; and if he will make a statement; [40860]

(2) if he will estimate how many people have developed tardive dyskinesia as a result of taking anti-psychotic drugs; and if he will make a statement. [40863]

Mr. Burns: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are currently prescribed anti-psychotic drugs; and if he will make a statement. [40862]

Mr. Malone: Information in the form requested is not available.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people he estimates were covered by private medical insurance in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1989 and *(c)* 1995. [40998]

Mr. Horam: The Department does not collect this information.

Management and Administrative Staff Costs

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for the *(a)* Doncaster Royal Infirmary and Mexborough Montagu NHS trust and *(b)* Doncaster Healthcare NHS trust the (i) total income, (ii) amount spent on the overall cost of management, staff, administrative staff and board members and (iii) (ii) as a percentage of (i) in each year since 1991–92. [40909]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the annual reports of the Doncaster Royal Infirmary and Mexborough Montagu and the Doncaster Healthcare national health service trusts respectively, published since September 1993.

Managers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of *(a)* managers and *(b)* senior managers employed by (i) each South Yorkshire health authority, (ii) each South Yorkshire health trust and (iii) in total, in each year since 1979. [40991]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

GP Lists

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the recommendations issued by his Department in respect of homeless people being placed on a general practitioner's list; up to how many refusals a homeless person may receive before he is placed on a general practitioner's list; and if he will make a statement. [40969]

Mr. Malone: A permanent address is not necessary for the registration of a patient with a general practitioner and all health authorities and general practitioners are aware of this. The Department encourages the permanent registration of homeless people wherever possible. Should, however, any patient have difficulty in registering with a doctor, health authorities have the power to assign the patient to a GP.

Voluntary Gender Reassignment

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current maximum age for voluntary gender reassignment on the national health service for *(a)* males and *(b)* females. [40859]

Mr. Horam: There are no clinically effective treatments provided under the national health service that should be withheld from any patient on age grounds alone. The NHS provides services for everybody on the basis of clinical need.

Dental Health

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what number of teeth affected by decay in five-year-old children, and what number of decayed, missing and filled teeth in 14-year-old children are currently found in the Doncaster health authority area; and what is the national average for each category. [40999]

Mr. Malone: The most recent figures available show that the number of decayed, missing and filled teeth—DMFT—for five-year-olds in Doncaster in 1993–94 was 2.15, while the national average was 1.74; and the DMFT figure for 14-year-olds in Doncaster in 1994–95 was 2.32 while the national average was 1.67.

Mentally Handicapped Children

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mentally handicapped children are currently in NHS hospital care in *(a)* the Trent region and *(b)* nationally; and what were the equivalent figures in each of the past four years. [40923]

Mr. Burns: I will write to the hon. Member.

Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Auraus

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospitals in South Yorkshire that have recorded incidents of MRSA since 1990; and how many patients suffered in each incident. [40992]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on 28 February, *Offical Report* columns *569–70.*

Nurses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of nurses employed by each of the health authorities in South Yorkshire for each of the last five years; and what was the national average for each health authority in this period. [40995]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

Nursery Places

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimate for unmet need for nursery places in England. [41044]

Mr. Burns: This information is not held centrally. Information on the percentage of children attending each type of pre-school day care facility was published in the Office of Population Censuses and Survey survey of "Day care services for children", 1990, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Resource Allocation

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish the official Government response to the Health Committee report into resource allocation. [41238]

Mr. Dorrell: The response to the report has been published today and copies placed in the Library.

Intensive Care Beds

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds there are in intensive care units in Leeds infirmary, St. James' hospital, Leeds and Pinderfields hospital, Wakefield. [41285]

Mr. Horam: Information on the daily number of available beds by ward classification is collected annually from each trust. The latest published information shows that in 1994–95, the average daily number of available beds in wards classified as adult intensive care were as follows:

United Leeds Teaching Hospitals National Health Service Trust: 28

St. James' University Hospital National Health Service Trust: 9

Pinderfields Hospital National Health Service Trust: 27

Notes:

1. Figures on numbers of beds by trust are published annually in 'Bed Availability for England' copies of which are available in the Library. Data for 1995–96 is available from 17 October 1996.

2. The figures above exclude intensive care cots and paediatric intensive care beds.

NHS Staff

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors and nurses have been employed in NHS hospitals in *(a)* West Yorkshire and *(b)* Leeds since 1990; and how many vacancies for doctors and nurses in West Yorkshire and Leeds remain unfilled at the present. [41289]

Mr. Hroam: I will write to the hon. Member.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what capacity of electricity used in his Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans he has to increase that capacity. [41322]

Mr. Horam: At present, no electricity used by the Department in its buildings is generated by a local combined heat and power plant.

One building, Richmond house in Whitehall, is connected to the Whitehall district heating system. It is proposed to convert the WDHS to a combined heat and power plant during the summer of 1997.

The energy requirements of the Department are kept under review and any opportunities to connect departmental buildings to a combined heat and power plant will be actively considered.

Coproxamol

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what names drugs containing coproxamol are marketed; and what is its concentration in each. [40608]

Mr. Malone: Coproxamol is authorised to be marketed under five names: distalgesic, cosalgesic tablets, co-proxamol tablets, co-proxamol tablets BP and co-proxamol tablets (paracetamol 325 mg dextro-propoxyphene 32.5 mg). All of these contain 32.5 mg dextropropoxyphene and 325 mg paracetamol.

Promotional Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department has spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotions, and *(c)* hospitality in each of the last six years. [40626]

Mr. Horan: Annual publicity spend information and hospitality spend for the financial years 1990–91 to 1995–96 is shown in the table. Promotions cannot easily be separated from publicity but the majority of health promotion work is in any case carried out by the Health Education Authority and other bodies.

£ million

Financial year	*Total publicity expenditure*	*Hospitality expenditure*
1990–91	21.01	0.16
1991–92	24.50	0.17
1992–93	20.71	0.25
1993–94	19.20	0.22
1994–95	18.20	0.23
1995–96	15.55	0.32

Paracetamol

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what names drugs containing paracetamol are marketed; and what is its concentration in each. [40609]

Mr. Malone: A list of the names of the 490 products containing paracetamol currently authorised for marketing, together with the content of paracetamol in each, will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his most recent calculation of the total number of deaths that have been *(a)* associated with, and *(b)* attributed to, paracetamol use in each of the past seven years for which records are available. [40606]

Mr. Malone: The number of deaths associated with paracetamol in 1993, 1994 and 1995 reported to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys—the Office for National Statistics from 1 April 1996 following a merger with the Central Statistical Office—is shown in the table. The data for 1989 to 1992 are published, for each year separately, in table 10 of "Mortality statistics:injury and poisoning, England and Wales", series DH4, Nos. 16–18, copies of which are available in the Library.

For the number of deaths attributed to paracetamol use in the past six years, reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 12 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *462*. For the year 1989, no fatal reports associated with the use of paracetamol were received by the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

	1993	*1994*	*1995*
Deaths by poisoning—accident	86(27)	94(26)	111(27)
Paracetamol only	44(9)	40(10)	41(6)
Paracetamol with other drugs[1]	42(18)	54(16)	70(21)
Deaths by poisoning - suicide	236(42)	212(25)	239(19)
Paracetamol only	67(7))	68(5)	77(2)
Paracetamol with other drugs[1]	169(35)	144(20)	162(17)
Deaths by poisoning—undetermined	130(25)	147(27)	218(30)
Paracetamol only	62(6)	52(5)	72(1)
Paracetamol with other drugs[1]	68(19)	95(22)	146(29)

[1] These include deaths from paracetamol-containing compounds. The figures in brackets include indicate the number of deaths with a mention of alcohol. These bracketed figures are already include in the unbracketed data and should not, therefore, be added to them.

Health Service Deficits

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list for each district health authority serving the Greater London area for each of the financial years 1996–97 and 1997–98 and subsequent years for which figures can be given *(a)* the recurrent deficit, *(b)* the non-recurrent surplus or deficit, *(c)* movement in balances, *(d)* the cash deficit and *(e)* those cash deficits expressed as a percentage of revenue or expenditure; [40794]

(2) when he received the letter dated 31 July from the hon. Member for Newham, South concerning his failure to answer his written question requesting information on health service deficits, of 22 July; when a substantive reply was sent; and for what reason the figures requested were regarded as being unsuitable for publication. [40795]

Mr. Horam: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as is possible.

Morphine

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effects on the public of potentially addictive drugs containing morphine available without prescription in the past four years. [40607]

Mr. Malone: Medicines containing morphine available without prescription are effective remedies for common complaints such as diarrhoea and cough. The low dose and limited strength allowable without prescription, and the requirement for supply under the supervision of a pharmacist are considered to minimise the potential for addiction. The Medicines Control Agency monitors the safety of all authorised medicines and since October 1992 there has been only one report of a side effect with these products. We are not aware of any significant problem of people misusing these medicines.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many answers to *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by his Department in each of the past two years. [40633]

Mr. Horam: This is a matter of public record.

Salaried General Practices

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to set up schemes for salaried general practice; and if he will make a statement. [40669]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* Proposals for the development of primary care health services, including a salaried option for general practitioners, are set out in the White Paper "Choice and Opportunity", Cm 3390, published on 15 October.

Copies have been placed in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Information

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many applications his Department, and non-departmental public bodies and executive agencies which report to his Department, have received for the release of information under the Environmental Information Regulations 1992 since they came into force; how much it has cost the Department to provide the information requested; how many applications for information were refused; what reasons were given for the non-provision of the information; what was the *(a)* average charge and *(b)* highest charge made in each year for the provision of information; and what plans he has to review the operation of the regulations. [40342]

Mr. Clappison: No records are kept of the number of applications for information under the Environmental Information Regulations 1992. The Department does not keep central records of the aggregate cost in supplying information nor of any charges levied—the vast majority of requests are met without a charge being levied.

As of April this year, when records were last collated, the Department had refused 33 requests for environmental information. The reasons cited for refusal were non-jurisdictional (1), manifestly unreasonable (3), international relations (3), national defence (3), legal or other proceedings (7), confidential deliberations (4), incomplete document (3), commercial confidentiality (7), contravene existing statutory provision (1), and delay (4).

The operation of the regulations will be reviewed at the end of this year and a report will be submitted to the European Commission.

Prosecutions

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the prosecutions carried out in England and Wales by the Environment Agency, in each month from 1 April 1996 to the latest available date, giving in each case the person or company prosecuted, the date and outcome of the prosecution, the nature of the offence, and where relevant, the penalty imposed; [40330]

(2) if he will list the prosecutions carried out by *(a)* Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, *(b)* the National Rivers Authority, *(c)* the London waste regulation authority and *(d)* local waste authorities, in each month from 1 January 1995 to 31 March 1996 in England and Wales, giving in each case the person or company prosecuted, the date and outcome of the prosecution, the nature of the offence and, where relevant, the penalty imposed. [40329]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* I have placed the following information in the Library of the House: prosecutions carried out by *(a)* Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, *(b)* the National Rivers Authority, and *(c)* the London waste regulation authority, between 1 January 1995 and 31 March 1996. Data relating to the prosecution activity of the 83 former local waste authorities are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

I have also placed in the Library of the House information on the prosecutions carried out by the Environment Agency for water quality and integrated pollution control offences from 1 April 1996 to the latest available date. Data relating to prosecutions by the Environment Agency for waste offences are not yet held centrally, although detailed records are held at local level. When the data on waste offences from 1 April 1996 are centrally available, I will write to the hon. Member with them.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sites of special scientific interest have been destroyed in each of the last 20 years; and how many sites are currently designated. [40359]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* Statistical information on damage to SSSIs in Great Britain is set out in the annual reports of the former Nature Conservancy Council. Since 1 April 1991, similar details for England, Scotland and Wales are contained in the annual reports of the country agencies and, for Great Britain, in that of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. Copies of annual reports are in the Library. As at 31 March 1996, 6,185 sites had been designated.

World Bank and IMF Meetings

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution his Department made to the United Kingdom submissions to the annual meetings of the World bank and International Monetary Fund held in Washington at the start of October; what environmental matters were discussed and decided upon during the meetings; and if he will place in the Library copies of all papers submitted to the meetings with an environmental component. [40652]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* Specific environmental issues were not on the formal agenda at the annual meetings of the World bank and International Monetary Fund earlier this month. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has placed in the Library copies of his speeches to these meetings and copies of the communiqués.

Orton Scar

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will send a representative of his Department on 14 October to Orton scar; and what assessment he has made of the damage to the limestone pavements there. [40720]

Mr. Clappison: None of my officials was available to attend the event at Orton village hall on the 14 October, but I welcome the news that Cumbria county council has secured the future protection of this site. English Nature, the Government's scientific adviser, has examined the

site. Although there has been some damage, almost five hectares of pavement will be protected by the new agreement.

Environmental Programmes (Employment)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the total employment opportunities available from programmes to *(a)* clean up contaminated land, *(b)* restore derelict land, *(c)* protect and promote sites of ecological fragility and special scientific interest and *(d)* enhance the habitat of protected species in the United Kingdom. [40779]

Mr. Clappison: The information is not held in the form requested.

Environmental Programmes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what *(a)* discussions and *(b)* other contact he has had with the World bank over the implementation of the bank's environmental management and sustainable development programmes; how many officials from his Department are on secondment to the World bank to work on environmental issues; and if he will make a statement on the impact on his departmental policy of the World bank's environmental policy programme. [40604]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 15 October 1996]:* Responsibility within government for the World bank rests with the Overseas Development Administration, with which the Department of the Environment co-operates very closely. The Government welcome the steps which the bank has taken to ensure that environmental concerns are properly reflected in its operations and continues to press for further improvements. There are no officials of the Department of the Environment on secondment to the World bank.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many environmental projects his Department co-sponsors with the World bank involving non-governmental organisations; and if he will make a statement on the role of non-governmental environmental and business groups in enhancing the global environment. [40599]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* The Department of the Environment does not co-sponsor any environmental projects with the World bank. As I said in answer to question 40604, responsibility for the World bank rests with the Overseas Development Administration. The Government believe that non-governmental and business groups have an important role to play in supporting sustainable development and in enhancing the global environment and wishes them to develop their role further.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to article 4(4) of Council decision number 46/96 of 27 June, *Official Journal of the European Communities* No. C 264/28–33, of 11 September, what plans he has to make available new resources for the co-funding of projects studies, non-governmental groups and audits to further the integration of the environmental dimension into sustainable development in industrial developing countries. [40811]

Mr. Clappison: Council regulation 46/96 of 27 June addresses action by the European Community, not member states. However, the Overseas Development Administration funds, and in some cases co-funds, a wide range of projects and studies to help developing countries draw up and implement sustainable development strategies, and to help them tackle specific environmental problems. This includes support to a large number of non-governmental groups. Over £200 million was spent in this way in 1995–96. The ODA also supports work on sustainable development in developing countries through its substantial contributions to European Union development funds and to other multilateral bodies such as the World bank and the global environment facility. All the ODA's work is subject to environmental screening.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consumer research his Department has commissioned since 1990 on the uptake of, and attitude to clean technology by British industry and British exporters, and what are the liaison arrangements between his Department and the appropriate export promotion division of the Department of Trade and Industry and the research council's clean technology unit in respect of the promotion of the expansion of clean technology research, demonstration, development and utilisation. [40765]

Mr. Clappison: My Department, with the Department of Trade and Industry, jointly manages the environmental technology best practice programme and the joint environmental markets unit. These programmes promote better environmental performance, including cleaner technology, and sponsor the environmental industry. Through these programmes, the Departments have undertaken attitude surveys of British industry and maintain close liaison arrangements with the export services of the DTI and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council's clean technology unit.

Planning System Indicators

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for what reasons the project to provide advice to the departmental planning directorate on the development of strategic indicators for the planning system has fallen behind the schedule established in the departmental "Minis Returns 16 (1995)". [40809]

Sir Paul Beresford: The research project on developing performance indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of planning policy was included, in Minis 16, in the Department's work programme for both 1994–95 and 1995–96. The project was subsequently extended into 1996–97 to provide both the Department and the researchers additional time to address the complex issues involved. It is now due to be completed in November 1996.

Water Quality

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations *(a)* he and *(b)* officials of his Department have had in the past year with (i) the World Health Organisation regional office for Europe, (ii) the United Kingdom water research centre at Medmenham and (iii) interested non-governmental environmental organisations, in regard to the effectiveness

of the WHO guidelines for drinking water purity as incorporated in the Water Resources Act 1991 and the Environment Act 1995. [40791]

Mr. Clappison: The WHO guidelines for drinking water quality were reviewed and updated in 1993 in the light of new scientific information. The revised guidelines form the basis of many of the standards contained in EC proposal COM (94) 612 final, concerning the quality of water intended for human consumption. My officials have consulted widely on the Commission's proposal for a revised drinking water directive. The consultations have involved among others, WRC Medmenham plc and numerous non-governmental organisations, including Friends of Earth and Greenpeace.

Business Pressures

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the negative effects of short-term business pressures on strategic thinking and cross-departmental work co-operation. [40808]

Mr. Gummer: A review conducted in 1995 concluded that my Department should improve its strategic approach to policy development and advice, which can all too easily suffer because of short-term pressures of work. Various steps have been taken to bring about such an improvement.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has received from British Nuclear Fuels concerning variation in the discharge authorisation for nuclear waste from the THORP facility. [40799]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on this subject on 14 October column 825.

Uranium Waste

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps have been taken to isolate and package pyrophoril uranium wastes at British Nuclear Fuels, Sellafield and Chapelcross plants since 1966. [40806]

Mr. Clappison: Any steps taken are a matter for BNFL subject to satisfying the regulatory requirements of the nuclear installations inspectorate.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the implications for Her Majesty's Government's policy on substitution for the return of radioactive waste to countries of origin after reprocessing of the European Council written reply H629/96 of 18 September on this issue. [40810]

Mr. Clappison: None. The assertion that

"BNFL is now considering the permanent on-site storage at Sellafield of high-level waste from the THORP plant, rather than returning it to foreign customers in Japan and Germany"

as contained in the question answered on 18 September H629/96 is incorrect.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the extent to which the sight ion exchange extraction plant—SIXEP—and the enhanced actinide removal plant—EARP—waste filtration plants servicing the thermal oxide reprocessing plant facility at Sellafield have met their planned operational functions. [40800]

Mr. Clappison: The operation of the SIXEP and EARP plants has been closely monitored by the Environment Agency, and previously Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, since the plants came into operation. This monitoring has revealed that the two plants have met and some cases exceeded planned operational functions. The agency is continuing to monitor plant performance.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources are available to the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee to commission independent scientific, technical or other relevant support studies from institutes or academic establishments. [40804]

Mr. Clappison: Members of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee are appointed for their ability to advise the Secretaries of State for the Environment, for Scotland and for Wales directly. Any additional advice required would normally be commissioned by the Government themselves. However, RWMAC is able to request resources to commission studies on an ad hoc basis.

The committee is currently undergoing a financial management and policy review. The prior options stage of this review will consider whether there is a continued need for the operation of RWMAC. If it is decided that the committee should continue, the second stage of the review will consider its structure and operation. This will include examination of the resources available to the committee.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to extend the remit of RWMAC to oversee the expenditure of public money by public companies and organisations charged with the management of nuclear waste. [40803]

Mr. Clappison: The Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee is currently undergoing a financial management and policy review. The prior options stage of this review will consider whether there is a continued need for the operation of RWMAC. If it is decided that the committee should continue, the second stage of the review will consider its structure and operation. This will include examination of the scope of the committee's remit.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what environmental policies are in place to cover the management of separated plutonium and plutonium contaminated wastes at nuclear facilities in the United Kingdom. [40805]

Mr. Clappison: Plutonium contaminated wastes are managed in accordance with the same policies that apply to all radioactive wastes. These are set out in the White Paper "Review of Radioactive Waste Management Policy—Final Conclusions", 1995, Cm 2919.

Separated plutonium is not designated as waste at United Kingdom facilities. It is managed through safeguards applied to nuclear materials under chapter VII of the Euratom treaty, and through voluntary agreements which the United Kingdom has under the International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards regime.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to request the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee to prepare guidance on the optimum environmental strategy on the handling, packaging, storage and disposal of plutonium designated as waste at United Kingdom facilities. [40802]

Mr. Clappison: There is no plutonium designated as waste at United Kingdom facilities.

Policy Documents (Implementation)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment what factors led to his Department's delayed implementation of the principles published in the Government documents "Appraisal and the Environment" and "Making Markets Work for the Environment"; and what has been done to rectify the delay. [40790]

Mr. Clappison: The principles set out in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" relate to the integration of environmental considerations into the formulation of policies, programmes and projects, through the use of appraisal methodology. An evaluation of the extent to which the "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" guidelines have been adhered to across Whitehall was to be undertaken last year, but had to be postponed due to resource constraints. However, consultants have now been commissioned to undertaken the study and a report is due around the end of the year. The findings should provide a good overview of the extent to which the approach in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" is being followed, and to comment on this before seeing the report would be to pre-judge the issue. "Making Markets Work for the Environment" is concerned with developing better instruments to deliver environmental and sustainable development policies. The Government are committed to seeking an appropriate balance between direct regulation, economic instruments and voluntary actions, in a way fully consistent with the approach set out in "Making Markets Work for the Environment".

Water Resources and Supply

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about public water resources and supply arrangements in the longer term. [41119]

Mr. Gummer: I commissioned in September 1995 a review of water resources and supply arrangements in England and Wales in the longer term. It has been undertaken with the full involvement of representatives of the water companies and their regulators—the Environment Agency, the Office of Water Services and the drinking water inspectorate. Other organisations have contributed views.

As a result of that work, my Department and the Welsh Office are publishing today a paper entitled "Water Resources and Supply: Agenda for Action". Copies are available in the Library of the House. The paper confirms that the framework within which public water supplies are provided and developed is sound. It discusses the various factors which need to be considered in refining longer-term arrangements and identifies actions which the Government will take, together with actions for the water companies and their regulators.

Prominent among these are steps which should be taken to build upon work on climate change, such as that which informed the report of my Department's climate change impacts review group which was published in July. Reliable yields of existing water resource systems need to be reassessed from recent data and against climate change scenarios. Water companies need to study in more detail how water is used by households and how that may change with changing climate.

Demand on existing water resources needs to be managed in order to reduce the need for new resources. This can be done by encouraging efficient use of water, through the development of effective and equitable charging arrangements for water supply, and by companies reducing leakage to economic levels. Against the background of maximum economic use of demand management and a clear understanding of the capabilities of each discrete water resource and supply system, there needs to be a dialogue between water companies and their customers on the balance to be struck between higher security of supply and higher costs, taking full account of the need for sustainable development.

A case for new water resource development will be compelling only if there is insufficient scope for deployment of existing resources to meet properly-managed demand. Where there are local resource pressures, water companies need to consider the scope for bulk transfers of water or redistribution of water abstraction licences. The Government believe that it is important that market mechanisms, including price signals, provide incentive for this and will publish a consultation paper on economic instruments in relation to water abstraction in early 1997.

The Environment Agency has the central role in the planning of water resources at the national and regional levels. However, water companies have the duty to develop and maintain water supply systems and it is their responsibility, with full involvement of their regulators, to draw up plans for the timely development of new resources if the projected demand for water in particular areas cannot be reasonably or reliably managed to remain within the capacity of all the available existing resources. Where the existing resources are most finely balanced against projected demand increases, new resource planning should proceed in parallel with the continued implementation of measures to meet demand from the existing resources and against the background of continuous review of that balance. Each of these organisations will no doubt publicise its response to those actions in due course.

The paper also draws attention to the various contributions which water companies, manufacturers of water-using equipment and water consumers can all make to the sustainable management of water resources through water conservation. This agenda for action is for us all and outlines a strategy for the environmentally sustainable provision of water supplies in the longer term.

Estuarial Boundaries

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has now revised the report of the National Rivers Authority reviewing estuarial boundaries with special reference to the Humber; and if he will make a statement of its effect on the urban waste water directive. [39910]

Mr. Clappison: My Department is considering the recommendations that the Environment Agency has made and I intend to make an announcement soon.

Environment Agency Guidance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sets of guidance have been published by *(a)* the Environment Agency and *(b)* its predecessor agencies during 1996; and if he will make a statement on the application of the guidance. [40438]

Mr. Clappison: This information requires compiling from a number of sources. I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Organophosphates

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies have been conducted by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the scientific panel of the Veterinary Products Committee of the environmental implications of the discharge of organophosphate sheep dip effluent into rivers and water courses; and if these studies were published. [40730]

Mr. Clappison: My Department has not carried out any studies, but the Environment Agency, which has statutory powers to protect the aquatic environment, has an on-going research and development programme. As part of this programme, the agency has published two reports "The Disposal of Sheep Dip Waste—Effects on Water Quality" (1994) and "Pesticides in the Aquatic Environment" (1995).

The activities of the Veterinary Products Committee are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to issue guidance to Health and Safety Executive inspectors to apply strict guidelines for the early investigation of incidents involving the alleged misuse of pesticides, including organophosphates. [40731]

Sir Paul Beresford: None. Guidance was issued in November 1993.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many prosecutions have taken place for the misuse of organophosphate pesticides under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985; how many prosecutions for organophosphate misuse have been made, pursuant to the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 since they came into force; and what steps have been taken to ensure stricter control over the use of organophosphates. [40735]

Sir Paul Beresford: There have been no prosecutions under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 concerning the misuse of organophosphate pesticides. Three prosecutions have been taken under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations and three convictions were secured.

The Health and Safety Executive has always strictly enforced health and safety legislation regarding the use of organophosphate pesticides at work. Free guidance has been sent to the agricultural sector and HSE inspectors give advice during workplace visits and, where necessary enforce measures to protect health and comply with FEPA and COSHH. Where significant shortcomings are found, they can issue enforcement notices and, ultimately prosecute.

HSE pursues an effective policy of guidance for prevention. This is considered more effective than regulation enforced by prosecution.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what joint research his Department has conducted with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food over the environmental implications of the failure of all sheep farmers to enrol in the certificate of competence for the safe use of organophosphate sheep dips under the National Proficiency Test Council [40732]

Mr. Clappison: No joint research has been conducted, but without a certificate of competence, sheep farmers may not purchase organophosphate sheep dips. The certificate, held by over 12,000 sheep farmers, ensures that the holders are aware of the requirements for the safe disposal of sheep dip.

Correspondence (Response Times)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the change in the time taken to reply to letters from hon. Members in each of the last three years; and what are the reasons for this change. [40659]

Mr. Gummer: The percentage of letters from honourable and right hon. Members replied to within the 15 days deadline in the last three years is as follows:

1995: 52 per cent.

1994: 57 per cent.

1993: 56 per cent.

The slower performance in 1995 resulted from the high pressures on the Department's resources. I am concerned about delays in replying to any letters and a recent departmental review has identified various ways in which performance can be improved.

Ministerial Speeches

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library copies of all speeches he made in the week beginning 7 October. [40815]

Mr. Gummer: The main text of my speech during the environment forum of the Conservative party conference and a note on the Government's environmental record that was produced for that are available in the Library. This emphasised the comprehensiveness of the Government's vision for an improved environment for us all, whether in city, town or country.

I also spoke at a number of fringe events about different aspects of current and future Government policies.

Speaking to the agriculture and countryside forum, I set out how Government policies help secure economic development in rural areas in a sustainable manner, and how we are extending our support for key rural services including the isolated village shop.

Speaking at the invitation of the Worldwide Fund for Nature, I demonstrated that the UK is a world leader both in meeting our existing climate change obligations, and in calling for more robust future targets for international action.

Speaking at the invitation of Conservative Students, I showed how active engagement in the European Union enables the Government to achieve a number of important environmental aims which we could not expect to achieve by acting alone.

Finally, I spoke to a meeting of the Conservative political centre on the theme "Town and Townscape—a thousand years of English urban culture". I drew attention to the importance of the town in our history and to the interdependence of urban and rural areas, restated the Government's commitment to strengthening the economy and environmental quality of our existing towns and cities, described how this helped us to realise our sustainable development objectives, and regretted that the official Opposition had signalled their desire to weaken existing support for town centres.

Text or transcripts of these other speeches are not available.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many answers to *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by his Department in each of the past two years. [40631]

Mr. Gummer: This is a matter of public record.

International Reports

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's policy regarding the assessment of relevant reports jointly produced by the World Health Organisation, World Meteorological Organisation and United Nationals Environment Programme. [40780]

Mr. Clappison: The Department of the Environment always takes into account relevant reports prepared by these organisations.

Green Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many green departmental meetings have been held since 26 July; what matters were *(a)* discussed and *(b)* decided; and when the next green ministerial meetings are planned. [40788]

Mr. Clappison: Government Departments' green contacts met on 18 September. They discussed and reached agreement on the draft agenda and the papers to be prepared for the next green Ministers meeting, which will be held on 28 October. Some green contacts met on 23 September to discuss the progress of a consultant's study to evaluate "Policy Appraisal and the Environment".

Asbestos

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to prohibit the use of asbestos in roof tiles. [41083]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Health and Safety Commission, in conjunction with my Department, will include the scope of asbestos prohibitions when reviewing the legislation. No doubt, asbestos-containing roof tiles will form part of this review. I will respond when this advice is received.

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will undertake an evaluation of the effectiveness and independence of asbestos sampling companies. [41106]

Sir Paul Beresford: As part of the Health and Safety Executive's monitoring of the effectiveness of asbestos regulations, the HSE investigates the performances of asbestos sampling companies where appropriate. The Health and Safety Commission's approved codes of practice on asbestos strongly encourage employers to use laboratories that are accredited by the national measurement accreditation service.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he will take to ensure that companies introduce an asbestos control programme in their workplace buildings, along the lines of the Health and Safety Executive booklet, "Managing Asbestos in Workplace Buildings". [41104]

Sir Paul Beresford: This is being promoted though the "Good Health is Good Business" campaign and by the HSE field inspectors during visits to businesses.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will undertake an evaluation of the safety of asbestos respirators. [41108]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to the HSE study "Workplace Effectiveness of Respiratory Protective Equipment for Asbestos Removal Work", published in July 1996.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will assess the advantages of introducing a ban on the use of white asbestos in British industry. [41103]

Sir Paul Beresford: Many uses of white asbestos are already prohibited. Whether or not the regulations should be extended will be a matter the Health and Safety Commission will consider in its current review of the legislation on asbestos. I will consider its recommendations carefully.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will undertake a study of the best methods of asbestos removal and sealing techniques. [41107]

Sir Paul Beresford: I do not intend to carry out such a study. The Health and Safety Executive already keeps under review the available techniques for asbestos removal and sealing, and issues guidance as appropriate. For example, HSE inspectors require all those undertaking asbestos removal operations to use controlled wet removal techniques unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will undertake an evaluation of the effectiveness of the asbestos licensing scheme. [41105]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983 have been subject to two reviews by the Health and Safety Commission. These reviews found that the regulations have been effective and were working well.

The Health and Safety Commission has also recently completed public consultation on a discussion document which outlined some possible adjustments to the licensing regime. The commission will be considering the results of the consultation, and I will examine any proposals the commission might subsequently make for amendments to legislation.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will undertake an evaluation of the value and purpose of medical examinations for workers who are currently or were previously exposed to asbestos. [41109]

Sir Paul Beresford: I do not intend to carry out such an evaluation. The Health and Safety Commission keeps under review the need for specific provisions of health and safety legislation. [41109]

Drought Orders

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many applications for drought orders have been *(a)* accepted and *(b)* refused in each of the past 10 years; [40880]

(2) if he will list the drought *(a)* orders and *(b)* permits refused in each of the last 10 years. [40881]

Mr. Clappison: The information is as follows:

	Applications received	*Orders made*[1]	*Applications withdrawn*	*Orders refused*
1987	—	—	—	—
1988	—	—	—	—
1989	118	89	27	2
1990	69	65	4	—
1991	33	28	4	1
1992	19	16	3	—
1993	—	—	—	—
1994	2	—	2	—
1995	61	53	8	—
1996	46	40	5	1

[1] A considerable number of the orders were made subject to conditions or amendments either at the recommendation of an Inspector (where a hearing was held) or the Environment Agency (formerly the National Rivers Authority).

The applications for drought orders which have been refused are as follows:

South West Water Authority (Burrator Reservoir)(Drought) Order—refused 15 August 1989

South West Water Authority (River Erme)(Drought) Order—refused 1 September 1989

South West Water Services Ltd. (River Axe)(Drought) Order—refused 1 July 1991

North West Water Ltd. (River Lune)(Drought) Order—refused 12 February 1996

Powers for the Environment Agency to authorise drought permits came into effect on 1 April 1996. As at 15 October 1996, 12 permits have been authorised and none has been refused.

Water Pollution

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will request the Environment Agency to investigate the leakage of chlorinated solvents into water sources close to the Atomic Energy Authority's Harwell science and engineering centre in Oxfordshire. [40441]

Mr. Clappison: The Environment Agency is carrying out an investigation and remedial works are in hand.

Confederation for British Industry

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the CBI's environment and health safety group; and what plans he has for further meetings. [40435]

Mr. Gummer: I keep in close contact with Roderick Paul, the chairman of the CBI's environment committee, through his membership of the UK Round Table on Sustainable Development. Senior officials from my Department also have regular meetings with the CBI's environment, health and safety group. The most recent meeting took place in August.

Geosphere-Biosphere Programme

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution departmental officials make to the global change newsletter of the international geosphere-biosphere programme; and if he will make a statement on the role of the geosphere-biosphere programme in respect of this policy on global climate changes. [40436]

Mr. Clappison: The global change newsletter reports research carried out by the international geosphere biosphere programme core programmes to other researchers and the national and international policy community. In general, departmental officials do not contribute to this newsletter. The UK contributes to the international geosphere biosphere programme through its nationally funded research programmes. Policy on climate change draws on a number of international scientific research programmes including those of the IGBP, largely through the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's scientific assessments.

World Trade Organisation

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the work done to date in the World Trade Organisation's committee on trade and the environment; and what matters are currently on the committee's agenda for forthcoming meetings. [40437]

Mr. Clappison: The World Trade Organisation's Committee on Trade and the Environment has carried out analytical work in accordance with the decision on trade and environment adopted by Ministers at Marrakesh on

15 April 1994. It is currently preparing its report to Ministers at the conference to be held in Singapore on 9 to 13 December 1996.

Intergovernmental Conference

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution his Department made to the United Kingdom submission on transparency to the intergovernmental conference in July; and if he will make a statement on the impact of the IGC discussions of transparency on his Department's policy. [40439]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 14 October 1996, column *827*.

Campaign for Water Justice

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what meetings he has held in 1996 with representatives of the Campaign for Water Justice. [40646]

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend has held no meetings with representatives of the Campaign for Water Justice to date in 1996.

Promotional Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much his Department has spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotions, and *(c)* hospitality in each of the last six years. [40624]

Sir Paul Beresford: The total figures for publicity, promotional expenditure and hospitality by my Department in each of the financial years requested are detailed.

Expenditure on publicity and promotions

£000's

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
DOE (central)	7,500	2,700	14,697	12,108	8,878	7,383
Planning Inspectorate	n/a	0	0	0	0	0
Building research establishment	230	385	286	324	244	287
QEII conference centre[1]	113	146	238	209	167	130
PSA services	1,760	1,800	1,300	820	nil	130
Total	9,603	5,031	16,521	13,461	9,289	7,800

[1] Figures for publicity for the QEII Conference Centre for 1990–91 to 1993–94 include hospitality.

Expenditure on hospitality

£000s

	1990-91	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*	*1994-95*	*1995-96*
DOE(Central)	62	56	92	68	76	73
Planning Inspectorate	n/a	0	1	1	2	1
Building Research Establishment	8	17	26	12	10	11
QEII Conference Centre[1]					15	12
PSA Services	44	98	133	50	2	0
Total	114	171	252	131	105	97

[1] Figures for publicity for the QEII Conference Centre for 1990–91 to 1993–94 include hospitality.

The figures for central publicity and promotional expenditure include value added tax, advertising agency fees where relevant and all other levies as paid.

Landfill Policy

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance has been published by the Environment Agency on landfill restoration and post-closure site management. [40658]

Mr. Clappison: In August the Environment Agency issued, for public consultation, a draft waste management paper 26E "Landfill Restoration and Post-Closure Management". The deadline for comments on this consultation paper is 18 November. Following this consultation, the Environment Agency will proceed to publish waste management paper 26E, which will provide guidance on landfill restoration and post-closure site management.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had recently with *(a)* his ministerial counterparts and *(b)* the European Commission concerning the United Kingdom landfill policy; and if he will make a statement. [40789]

Mr. Clappison: Recently, the United Kingdom's landfill policy has been discussed in the context of the European Commission's communication on the review of the Community strategy for waste management. The Commission's communication suggests that all waste going to landfill should be pre-treated. There is no sound

scientific basis to this approach. Landfill when properly engineered and controlled is a viable waste management option for a range of wastes.

The United Kingdom favours the disposal of untreated biodegradable waste to landfill, and the use of the biochemical process engineering—bio-reactor—approach to manage landfill sites. This approach is designed to prevent pollution caused by the degradation process, and to provide conditions in the landfill in which stabilisation of the waste in situ is as rapid as possible. The approach is based on research into landfill practices that the Department of the Environment has sponsored for more than 20 years.

Basel Convention Amendment

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy on the 1995 amendment to the Basel convention; and if he will make a statement. [40787]

Mr. Clappison: The Government support the decision, taken at the third conference of the parties to the Basel convention in September 1995, to amend the convention.

European Parliament

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements he has made to monitor the committee meeting discussions and reports examined at the European Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection. [40792]

Mr. Clappison: The Department studies the reports of the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection and receives the agendas for committee meetings on a regular basis. Officials from the Department, or the UK permanent representation in Brussels, generally attend these meetings when matters of relevance to the Department are discussed.

Carbon Dioxide Disposal

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has made an assessment of the Joule II project report No. CT92-0031 on the underground disposal of carbon dioxide. [40814]

Mr. Clappison: Officials in my Department have considered the Joule II report and have been in touch directly with the British Geological Survey which participated in the study. Our assessment is that underground disposal of CO_2 from large sources such as power stations is technically feasible, but costly. The process would add an estimated 40 per cent. or more to the cost of electricity, mainly because of the additional capital expenditure needed at power stations, and the cost of the energy required to extract and dispose of the CO_2.

Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the reasons for delay in the adoption and implementation of the convention on prior informed consent for hazardous chemical and pesticide trade. [40793]

Mr. Clappison: The intergovernmental negotiating committee for a legally binding instrument on the prior informed consent procedure has held two meetings and at least two more are likely to be required to reach final agreement on the complicated issues involved. In the meantime, the present voluntary procedure will continue to be operated by the United Nations Environment Programme and Food and Agriculture Organisation.

Construction Products (Fire Testing)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on test procedures for the evaluation of the reaction to fire of construction products. [40748]

Mr. Clappison: The test procedures at present in British standards and which are used to determine the reaction to fire properties of construction products for regulatory purposes are likely to be replaced by a set of new harmonised European test methods as part of the process of enabling the single market in such products. Several dozen different test methods are in use throughout the EU and it is proposed that these should be replaced by five new procedures now under development under the auspices of the European Commission and in CEN, the European standards organisation. Fire experts from the UK are taking an active part in this process.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41179]

Sir Paul Beresford: Expenditure on external consultants since 1992, in 1996 prices, is as follows:

Year	*Expenditure £*
1992–93	11.4
1993–94	11.1
1994–95	11.8
1995–96	9.2

It is not feasible precisely to quantify savings achieved by consultants since their work is usually only one of several factors leading to total savings achieved by a particular project.

Health and Safety Executive (Free Books)

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many free books were distributed by the books division of the health and safety division each year; to which organisations; what proposals he has to introduce charges for these supplies; and what is the projected potential income per year if payment is required. [41128]

Sir Paul Beresford: Between April 1990 and March 1996 the Health and Safety Executive has issued an average seven million free publications each year. The

HSE does not list by category the customers to whom these publications are distributed. The HSE has no plans to charge for such supplies.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the costs to the books division of the Health and Safety Executive for each year since 1991 for supplying bulk supplies of free books and leaflets to organisations with charitable status. [41126]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is not available.

Cricket Stadium, Wakefield

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the issuing of an article 14 directive by his Department's Leeds office to the City of Wakefield metropolitan district council for the outline planning application for a new stadium for Yorkshire county cricket club at Wakefield; and if he will make a statement on the application by Leeds city council for a proposed new county cricket ground at Aberford. [40984]

Sir Paul Beresford: An article 14 direction was issued to Wakefield metropolitan council on 23 July, preventing the council from granting planning permission for the proposed development at Denby Dale road, Wakefield. The Secretary of State is concerned that planning issues of more than local importance may arise from the proposal and he wishes to consider it having regard to his policy on calling-in planning applications. Further information is awaited from the council to enable the Secretary of State to complete this consideration.

Leeds city council is considering a planning application for a cricket ground at Parlington near Aberford. Should the council be minded to grant planning consent, I understand that the application will be referred to the Secretary of State as a departure from the development plan.

Lead

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are estimated to work with lead and its compounds in the United Kingdom. [41123]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Health and Safety Executive is aware of approximately 18,000 workers working with lead and its compounds. However, this is probably an underestimate.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps have been taken by the Health and Safety Executive to draw attention to the dangers of working with lead, following the ombudsman report into lead poisoning at Stallite Batteries, Yorkshire in 1990. [41122]

Sir Paul Beresford: As a direct result of the ombudsman report, the operation of the appointed doctor system has been improved. Guidance for appointed doctors has been updated.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* improvement notices, *(b)* prohibition notices and *(c)* fines have been issued in each year since the lead regulations became law in 1981; and if he will indicate the average amount for fines. [41125]

Sir Paul Beresford: Table A gives the number of improvement and prohibition notices issued under the Control of Lead at Work Regulations 1980 by the Health and Safety Executive since 1986. Figures for earlier years are not readily available. Table B gives the number of convictions and average fines for the same years.

Table A: Control of Lead at Work Regulations 1980 Enforcement notices issued by HSE's field operations division inspectorates 1986–87 to 1995–96 [1]

Year	Improvement Notice	Prohibition Notice	Total
1986–87	64	50	114
1987–88	39	23	62
1988–89	41	17	58
1989–90	65	8	73
1990–91	75	7	82
1991–92	60	33	93
1992–93	42	1	43
1993–94	53	11	64
1994–95	56	9	65
1995–96[1]	32	3	35
Total	527	162	689

[1] Provisional figures.

Table B: Proceedings instituted by HSE's field operations division under the Control of Lead at Work Regulations 1980

Year	Convictions	Average fine (£)
1986–87	12	135
1987–88	7	457
1988–89	7	507
1989–90	8	275
1990–91	10	1,000
1991–92	9	1,022
1992–93	2	1,000
1993–94	1	450
1994–95	0	0
1995–96	0	0

Planning Policy

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what priority he attaches to the achievement of sustainable patterns of development and the maintenance of long-term green belt boundaries as set out in PPG13 and PPG2 when he considers local plans as they relate to the green belt; and if he will make a statement. [41056]

Sir Paul Beresford: The fundamental aim of green belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl. Green belts can assist in moving towards more sustainable patterns of development. Their boundaries should be altered only in exceptional circumstances. PPG2 advises on the possible need to safeguard land for longer-term development needs, taking account of sustainable development, and on relating such land to public transport infrastructure.

The Secretary of State examines development plans carefully to identify whether their scope reflects national and regional planning guidance and whether there are conflicts which do not appear to be justified by local circumstances. If necessary, he will make a formal intervention.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that adopted local plans comply with Government policy as expressed in the most recent planning policy guidance notes; and if he will make a statement. [41057]

Sir Paul Beresford: Section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requires that where, in making a determination under the planning Acts, regard is to be had to the development plan, a planning decision shall be made in accordance with the adopted or approved plan for the area, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Secretary of State expects local planning authorities to keep their local plans under review to ensure they remain up to date and appropriate documents for taking decisions on land use in their area. Where new or revised government policy is issued after a local plan has been adopted, local planning authorities are expected to consider such policies when the plan is reviewed. However, expressions of Government planning policy, for example in planning policy guidance notes or circulars, are capable of being a material consideration which must also be taken into account, where relevant, by the local authority in taking decisions on planning applications.

Occupational Injuries

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many serious injuries at work, involving three or more days absence from work, occurred in each of the last five years. [41133]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 required responsible persons—principally, employers and self-employed people—in most industries to report to the health and safety enforcing authorities work-related accidents to employees or self-employed people resulting in: death, major injury as defined in the regulations; or incapacity to do normal work for more than three days. Similar, but separate reporting requirements applied to the railway and offshore industries.

The total number of accidents reported for all industries in each of the last five years are as follows:

Injuries to workers[1] reported to enforcing authorities 1991–92 to 1995–96[2]

Year	*Fatal*	*Major[4]*	*Over three days[5]*	*Total*
1991–92	368	18,698	154,338	173,404
1992–93	339	18,053	143,283	161,675
1993–94	296	17,979	137,459	155,734
1994–95	272	18,354	142,218	160,844
1995–96[2]	256	17,571	132,359	150,186

[1] Includes employees, trainees and self-employed persons.
[2] Provisional.
[3] Years commencing 1 April.
[4] Injuries that result in hospitalisation for more than 24 hours.
[5] Any injury resulting in incapacity to perform normal work for more than three days.

Animal Remains, Penistone

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the result of the examination by Doncaster museum of the remains of a body of an animal found on land at Flouch, near Penistone, South Yorkshire in August; and if he will make a statement. [40966]

Mr. Clappison: I will write to the hon. Member.

New Buildings and Premises

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by his Department and its agencies; and if he will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41145]

Sir Paul Beresford: I will write to the hon. Member.

Planning Inquiries

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what procedures should be adopted when new Government guidance is issued following the close of a local planning inquiry but before the adoption of that plan; how the public and participants in the inquiry are to be kept informed and involved; and if he will make a statement. [41058]

Sir Paul Beresford: If new Government guidance is issued following the close of a local plan inquiry, but before the planning inspector issues his report, that new guidance will be taken into account by the inspector in making his recommendations. In considering the inspector's recommendations, the local planning authority will decide what formal modifications need to be made to the plan. If new guidance is issued after the inspector's report has been received by the local authority, then the authority will need to decide how it intends to take on board the new guidance through formal modifications to the plan. The processes involved in making modifications to the plan, and in keeping the public and participants in the inquiry informed, are detailed in the Town and Country Planning (Development Plan) Regulations 1991, and in the code of practice on development plans, issued by my Department as a booklet, "Development Plans: What you need to know". However, planning policy guidance note 12, paragraph 4.19 makes it clear that where new information becomes available at a late stage in the plan adoption process, and modification would only delay implementation of proposals not affected by the new information, it may be preferable to adopt the plan and start an early review.

Deaths at Work

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many deaths at work occurred in each of the last five years; how many cases the Health

and Safety Executive has referred to the Crown Prosecution Service for consideration of manslaughter charges; how many prosecutions took place; and how many were successful. [41132]

Sir Paul Beresford: The number of deaths at work reported to all enforcing authorities, including local authorities, in each of the last five years is as follows:

	Deaths at work
1991–92	473
1992–93	452
1993–94	403
1994–95	376
1995–96[1]	338

[1] Provisional.

The number of cases investigated by the Health and Safety Executive which have been referred to the Crown Prosecution Service since April 1992 for consideration of possible manslaughter charges, and the outcome, is as follows:

Year[1]	*Number of cases referred to CPS*	*Prosecutions for manslaughter started by CPS*	*Guilty verdicts*
1992–93	12	2	—
1993–94	5	1	1
1994–95	12	4	1
1995–96	9	2	1
1996–97	2	—	—
Totals	40	9	3

[1] Information for previous years is available only at disproportionate cost.

Contaminated Land

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the results of his Department's liaison with the Department of Trade and Industry in respect of compensation to English Partnerships relating to the clean-up of contaminated land used for coal extraction. [40962]

Sir Paul Beresford: I hope that an announcement can be made shortly.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sentences in cases where companies were found guilty under health and safety law following the death at work of an employee, involved imprisonment; and how many resulted in fines of *(a)* less than £5,000, *(b)* £5,000 to £10,000, *(c)* £10,000 to £50,000 and *(d)* more than £50,000. [41134]

Sir Paul Beresford: Of the three cases in which people have been sent to prison following convictions under health and safety at work law, none followed a work-related death.

The other information requested is available only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Association Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many housing association houses were built in each South Yorkshire local authority in each of the last four years. [40965]

Mr. Clappison: Estimates of dwellings completed by housing associations in each local authority area in England are shown in the publication "Local Housing Statistics". Figures for the years 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995 are in issue numbers 109, 110, 117 and 118 respectively.

While these figures cover newly built accommodation, housing associations have also provided additional social lettings by the rehabilitation of existing properties and the various home incentive schemes, whose relative importance has been growing with the greater emphasis being placed on making more effective use of existing stock.

Display Screen Equipment Regulations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he estimates he will publish the results of the review of the display screen equipment regulations; and if he will make a statement. [40849]

Sir Paul Beresford: The results of the review of the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 are still being considered. As soon as this is completed, I hope the Health and Safety Commission will be able to publish the report.

Sewerage Systems

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the terms of reference of the committee reviewing the current revision of water byelaws and regulations with particular reference to setting standards for the construction and maintenance of sewerage systems. [40882]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Water Regulations Advisory Committee's terms of reference are to advise the Secretary of State for the Environment on the requirements for plumbing installations and fittings to be included in water regulations made under powers in section 74 of the Water Industry Act 1991 and on other technical matters connected with the regulations.

As provided for under section 74, the regulations will deal with contamination, waste, undue consumption and misuse of water in premises; they will not set standards for the construction and maintenance of sewerage systems.

The extension of the current water byelaws, membership of the committee and a timetable of meetings was announced by departmental press release on 14 October. Copies of the press release are available in the House Library.

Development (Outer London)

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the conditions for permitted development in respect of a bungalow in an outer-London borough. [40941]

Sir Paul Beresford: Householders may make certain types of minor changes to their dwellings without needing to apply for planning permission. These "permitted developments" are prescribed in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. For a bungalow in outer London the following developments, among others, would be permitted:

(i) the extension of the dwelling, providing the enlargement does not exceed 70 cubic metres at 15 per cent. (whichever is the greater) and providing in any case that the volume of the original house is not increased by more than 115 cubic metres;

(ii) the addition or alteration of a roof, providing the altered roof slope does not face a highway, and providing the addition does not increase the overall height of the dwelling nor add more than 50 cu m to the volume of the house. (Any additional volume created by a roof extension counts against the total volume limits of (i) above).

I am sending an extract of the general permitted development order and a booklet describing its contents to my hon. Friend.

1991 Census

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment when the findings of the analysis of the 1991 census commissioned from Newcastle university will be available. [40956]

Mr. Curry: This is being published today. Copies of the report "Urban Trends in England: Latest Evidence from the 1991 Census" have been lodged in the Library of the House.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what finances he has made available to authorities that have been or are to be reorganised on 1 April 1995–96, and 1997 for reoganisation costs incurred by them in 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [40955]

Mr. Curry: On 26 April I invited authorities that have been or are to be reorganised on or before 1 April 1997 to submit outturn figures of the amount of expenditure they incurred on transitional costs of reorganisation in 1995–96. On the basis, inter alia, of the information provided by the authorities, I have decided the amounts of supplementary credit approvals to allocate towards such costs in 1995–96. I have given priority to authorities that were reorganised on or before 1 April 1996.

The amounts are as follows:

SCAs: £000 rounded

Authority	*1995–96*
Isle of Wight	
Isle of Wight Council	1,536
Cleveland	
Cleveland County Council	3,169
Hartlepool Borough Council	3,200
Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council	2,891
Middlesborough Borough Council	2,160
Stockton on Tees Borough Council	2,947
Avon	
Avon County Council	2,910
Bristol City Council	2,719
North Somerset District Council	3,197
Bath and North East Somerset Council	1,769
Bath City Council	299
Wansdyke District Council	715
South Gloucestershire Council	1,790
Kingswood Borough Council	438
Northavon District Council	484
Humberside	
Humberside County Council	2,900
Hull City Council	3,080
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	1,200
Beverley Borough Council	800
Boothferry Borough Council	90
East Yorkshire Borough Council	864
Holderness Borough Council	500
North Lincolnshire Council	1,898
Glanford Borough Council	468
Scunthorpe Borough Council	626
North East Lincolnshire DC	1,634
Cleethorpes Borough Council	394
Great Grimsby	922
North Yorkshire	
North Yorkshire County Council	1,400
Ryedale District Council	—
Selby District Council	685
York District Council	2,996
York City Council	550
Total	51,231

In addition, £200,000 has been issued, and distributed by the Home Office, for the reorganisation costs of combined fire authorities.

On 29 November 1995 I announced that I had considered carefully the bids submitted by authorities that are to be reorganised in 1997, but that, in my view, none of the bids established a sufficiently strong case to justify an allocation of SCA for 1995–96, *Official Report*, column *734*. I have taken the same view following consideration of outturn bids submitted by these authorities. I have, however, issued capitalisation directions for the net eligible revenue expenditure incurred.

Sheffield and Tinsley Canal

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his proposals in respect of the Sheffield and Tinsley canal. [40957]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Under the provisions of the Transport Act 1968, I have today made an order to upgrade the Sheffield and Tinsley canal from a remainder to cruising waterway.

British Waterways, which manages the canal, has in partnership with Sheffield city council and Sheffield development corporation, restored it to cruising standard. Reclassification is widely supported by local authorities, the boating industry and waterway user groups and will play an important part in regenerating the surrounding area. Significant public and private investment has already been committed to the area, and I am sure that upgrading the canal will boost investor confidence and help secure future investment.

European Week for Health and Safety

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what sums from public funds were allocated for promoting European week for Health and Safety; and if he will make a statement. [40850]

Sir Paul Beresford: The European Week for Safety and Health was aimed to encourage organisations themselves to raise awareness about hazards in the workplace and to be more effective in managing health and safety. In the UK we especially encouraged participation in the "Good Health is Good Business" campaign. I am extremely pleased that over 10,000 UK organisations registered an interest in participating in the European week. The Health and Safety Executive supported the week at a cost of £50,000.

Storm Damage (Torbay)

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide financial assistance to Torbay borough council under the Bellwin scheme for the costs incurred in dealing with exceptional storms in January 1996. [41218]

Mr. Curry: I am satisfied that financial assistance under the Bellwin scheme is justified given the exceptional nature of the storms between 20 and 24 January 1996. A scheme will, therefore, be established under section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Grant will be paid to cover 85 per cent. of eligible costs which are above a threshold, and which have been incurred by Torbay borough council in dealing with the aftermath of those storms.

Housing Associations

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will examine how local needs are defined by housing associations seeking planning permission; and what advice his Department currently issues as to how these should be defined. [41199]

Mr. Clappison: Housing associations do not themselves define local housing needs. The responsibility to define and prioritise local housing needs rests with the local authority, in consultation with housing associations, the Housing Corporation, Government regional offices, local developers and other with an interest.

The Department provides guidance each year to local authorities on how to prepare their housing strategy and housing investment programme bid. The Housing Corporation also issues a national policy statement each year, containing details of the investment strategy for the next bidding round. Each August, the Housing Corporation publishes regional policy statements, containing details of the agreed local housing needs and priorities. Housing associations are invited to prepare schemes to meet these needs, and to submit them to the corporation for funding from the approved development programme.

Once a scheme is approved, it is for the association to seek planning permission in the normal way.

Commission for the New Towns

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Commission for the New Towns will be wound up; and what are its remaining powers. [41235]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration on 15 May 1996, *Official Report*, columns *489–90*. A decision on the future of the Commission for the New Towns will be made in due course. In the meantime, it continues with all its normal activities.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what programme has been set for the Commission for the New Towns at Basildon. [41229]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Commission for the New Towns continues to dispose of the remaining new town land holdings and other assets at a rate consistent with maximising receipts and securing value for money, while also disengaging from its remaining liabilities. This applies to all towns where it is involved, including Basildon.

Castle Cement

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what test results are on the public register for kiln 6 at Castle Cement's Ribblesdale plant at Clitheroe when burning coal only or coal and cemfuel. [41236]

Mr. Clappison: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution—now the Environment Agency—carried out tests in respect of kiln 5 at Ribblesdale plant. Since kiln 6 is a similar kiln, the inspectorate did not consider it necessary to carry out tests for that kiln also. There are therefore no test results in the public register in relation to kiln 6, but all test results for kiln 5 are in the register.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much pet coke has been burnt in kilns at Ribblesdale—Castle Cement, Clitheroe—in each year since 1990; and in which kilns. [41237]

Mr. Clappison: No pet coke has been burnt at the Ribblesdale plant since 1990.

Community Alarm Schemes

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to resolve uncertainties about the statutory powers available to local authorities to provide community alarm schemes for their residents; and if he will make a statement. [41241]

Mr. Curry: Community alarm schemes have become an increasingly common way to help vulnerable people to feel more secure in their own homes. Such schemes enable people in distress to summon assistance quickly and can be used to help the elderly to remain in their own homes, or support disabled people living in sheltered housing. They can also be useful in tackling crimes such as repeat burglary, domestic violence or racial harassment.

In the light of concerns that have been expressed, in particular by the Audit Commission and the Association of District Councils, about the statutory basis on which local authorities may operate such schemes, we have today published a consultation paper - entitled "Local Authorities and Community Alarm Schemes"—and this paper examines the present statutory framework and outlines the Government's preliminary view that local authorities' role in the provision of community alarms should be extended to allow them to provide, and charge for, this service to anyone resident in their area. If the Government were to conclude in the light of comments that this wider role should be given to local authorities, their intention would be to legislate to this effect at the next convenient opportunity.

I have arranged for copies of the consultation paper to be placed in the Library of the House. Copies are being sent to the local authority associations, individual local authorities and other interested parties, all of which are being invited to respond by 16 January 1997.

Enterprise Zones (Easington)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the timetable for the transfer of the non-operational land designated enterprise zones at Dowdon and Fox Cover situated in the Easington district to English Partnerships: and if he will make a statement. [41222]

Sir Paul Beresford: I hope that an announcement can be made shortly.

Special Areas of Conservation

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will be sending further candidate special areas of conservation to the European Commission under the EC habitats directive. [41277]

Mr. Gummer: I indicated in my written reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) on 9 January 1996, *Official Report*, column 7, that further candidate special areas of conservation would be sent to the European Commission once points raised in public consultation had been considered and satisfactorily resolved. A further list of 44 sites was sent to the Commission on 14 October.

Consideration continues to be given to the remaining sites considered.

The list of sites sent to the Commission is as follows:

	Country
Achmore Bog	Scotland
Beinn Dearg	Scotland
Beinn a'Ghlo	Scotland
Beinn Iadain and Beinn na h' Uamha	Scotland
Ben Alder and Aonach Beag	Scotland
Ben Heasgarnich	Scotland
Ben Lawers	Scotland
Ben Lui	Scotland
Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast	England/Scotland
Border Mires, Kielder-Butterburn	England
Chesil and the Fleet	England
Claish Moss and Kentra Moss	Scotland
Coalburn Moss	Scotland
Creag Meagaidh	Scotland
Durness	Scotland
Essex Estuaries	England
Fal and Helford	England
Flanders Mosses	Scotland
Loch Eport Lagoons	Scotland
Loch Maddy	Scotland
Loch of Stenness	Scotland
Loch Roag Lagoons	Scotland
Loch Sunart Woodlands	Scotland
Meall na Samnha	Scotland
Moidach More	Scotland
Monach Islands	Scotland
Moray Firth (marine)	Scotland
Morecambe Bay	England
Mousa	Scotland
North Harris	Scotland
North Rona	Scotland
North Uist Machair	Scotland
Papa Stour	Scotland
Plymouth Sound and Estuaries	England
Solent and Isle of Wight Lagoons	England
Solway Firth	England/Scotland
Solway Mosses (part)	England
Sound of Arisaig	Scotland
South Uist Machair	Scotland
St. Kilda	Scotland
Thanet Coast	England
The Vadills	Scotland
The Wash and North Norfolk Coast	England
Usk Bat Sites/Safleoedd Ystlumod Wysg	Wales

Central Heating

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the percentage of dwellings with central heating for each constituency in the United Kingdom. [41283]

Mr. Clappison: Information is not available in this precise form. The 1991 census parliamentary constituency monitors provide figures for the number of households with and without central heating and copies are held in the Library.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what capacity of electricity used in his Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans he has to increase that capacity. [41320]

Mr. Clappison: This Government are committed to CHP and has recently published a national strategy which has been well received.

My Department's new headquarters buildings will both have CHP systems each with a capacity of 480 kW. In addition, the Whitehall district heating scheme, which covers a wide range of government buildings, will have a new CHP system from next autumn with a capacity of 4,500kW.

Hedgerows

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish draft regulations for the protection of important hedgerows; and if he will make a statement. [41278]

Mr. Gummer: The Government will issue for consultation on 21 October draft regulations for the protection of important hedgerows in England and Wales, under section 97 of the Environment Act 1995. The regulations are to be introduced jointly by the Secretary of State for the Environment, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for Wales.

The Government are keen, during this consultation, to hear from a wide range of people and organisations that may be affected by, or have an interest in, these proposals—before the detailed arrangements are finalised.

The criteria for determining whether a hedgerow is important are based on a study undertaken by ADAS to develop a hedgerow evaluation system. The report will be published at the same time as the draft regulations.

Copies of the draft regulations and ADAS report will be placed in the House Library.

Health and Safety Prosecutions

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cases, where companies were found guilty under health and safety law following the serious injury at work of an employee, resulted in fines of *(a)* less than £5,000, *(b)* £5,000 to £10,000, *(c)* £10,000 to £50,000 and *(d)* more than £50,000. [41135]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is available only at disproportionate cost.

Homelessness

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* households, *(b)* pensioners and *(c)* families with children (i) presented and (ii) were accepted as homeless in (1) Doncaster, (2) Mexborough and (3) South Yorkshire in each year since 1979. [40963]

Mr. Clappison: The available data on households dealt with under the homelessness provisions of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 and the Housing Act 1985 are set out in the tables. The figures for acceptances of households with children or a vulnerable household member could be provided only at disproportionate cost for South Yorkshire for the years before 1991, other than those given for Doncaster. Separate figures for Mexborough are not available.

Households accepted for re-housing

Doncaster

Year	*Applications/ enquiries*[1]	*Total*	*Of which households with: vulnerable member due to old age*	*Children*
1979	n/a	366	n/a	n/a
1980	n/a	294	n/a	n/a
1981	n/a	326	n/a	n/a
1982	[2]747	438	[2]19	204
1983	1,008	321	28	202
1984	1,245	312	22	169
1985	1,023	320	24	183
1986	939	295	21	163
1987	711	285	15	133
1988	1,472	368	46	155
1989	1,581	554	32	369
1990	2,012	1,386	58	676
1991	2,111	425	24	219
1992	1,707	534	[2]11	[2]164
1993	2,142	692	28	489
1994	1,743	449	35	235
1995	1,803	336	21	159

[1] The data collected from authorities has, since April 1991, included a request for the number of applications or enquiries first recorded during the quarter. The data provided is not reported on a consistent basis across authorities as it reflects differing local administrative practices and cannot, therefore, be used to produce national or regional totals of applications/enquiries. The available figures prior to April 1991 are not comparable with later data as they have a narrower coverage—they cover only the number of cases in which enquiries carried out by the authority were completed during the year.

[2] Data for 2 quarters only.

Households accepted for re-housing

South Yorkshire[1]

Year	*Total*	*Of which households with: vulnerable member due to old age*	*Children*
1979	810	—	—
1980	840	—	—
1981	940	—	—
1982	1,720	—	—
1983	1,130	—	—
1984	830	—	—
1985	n/a	—	—
1986	n/a	—	—
1987	n/a	—	—
1988	2,800	—	—
1989	3,400	—	—
1990	4,010	—	—
1991	3,040	80	1,720
1992	2,900	70	1,660
1993	3,090	80	2,040
1994	2,340	70	1,460
1995	2,070	60	1,270

[1] The data collected from authorities has, since April 1991, included a request for the number of applications or enquiries first recorded during the quarter. The data provided is not reported on a consistent basis across authorities as it reflects differing local administrative practices and cannot, therefore, be used to produce national or regional totals of applications/enquiries. The available figures prior to April 1991 are not comparable with later data as they have a narrower coverage—they cover only the number of cases in which enquiries carried out by the authority were completed during the year.

[2] Data for 2 quarters only.

Flooding (Folkestone)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide financial assistance to Shepway district council under the Bellwin scheme for the costs incurred in dealing with the extensive flooding in Folkestone on 12 August. [41282]

Sir Paul Beresford: I am satisfied that financial assistance under the Bellwin scheme is justified given the exceptional nature of the floods in Folkestone on 12 August. A scheme will, therefore, be established under section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Grant will be paid to cover 85 per cent. of eligible costs which are above a threshold and which have been incurred by Shepway district council in dealing with those floods.

Uranium Particles

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies have been commissioned or undertaken by his Department into the nephrotoxicity of inhalation of uranium particles. [40807]

Sir Paul Beresford: I will write to the hon. Member.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 17 October 1996

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Internet

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he proposes to take to keep illegal material off the Internet. [41234]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Internet is one of the most important developments in information technology of recent years, and the Government are determined that problems with the very small proportion of illegal material should not jeopardise the enormous potential benefits of the Internet to UK users.

The basis for the Government's approach is that the Internet is not a legal vacuum: the law applies on-line as it does off it.

We therefore welcome the recent industry-led initiative in the UK, put forward by the two leading UK trade associations, the Internet Service Providers Association and the London internet exchange, Linx, supported by the Government and the police, and facilitated by the DTI, which addresses these difficult issues. The proposals, "R³ Safety-Net" launched at a press conference at the DTI on 23 September, have two main parts. First, service providers will take responsibility for the removal from their servers of material which is notified to them as being illegal in the UK—for example, material which it is considered breaches the Criminal Justice Act 1988, under which it is an offence to possess child pornography. A hotline is to be established via which members of the public can report instances of material which they consider might be illegal. Secondly, news groups and web pages will be given a rating according to their usual content, so that users can chose to avoid those where illegal material has previously been found, or which contain material they personally may find offensive. Internet service providers will also contribute to research into the application of ratings systems, and the development of relevant screening software, to deal with material which, whilst not illegal, may be found offensive by many people. Copies of the proposals have been placed in the House Library, and can also be accessed on the DTI's homepage on the World Wide Web.

This initiative represents a concrete, practical and positive start to the problems of illegal or offensive material being distributed on the Internet. It also strikes the right balance between the need to ensure that the Internet can be used safely and the need to safeguard freedom of speech. There is already effective statutory backing to this approach because existing law applies on the Internet. No new regulation is needed.

This approach is the first in the world to bring industry, Government and the police together in this way. Work is now under way to promote its adoption internationally, which is vital given the ease with which material can be transmitted across borders. A positive start has been made in discussions in the EU following the recent Telecoms Council.

Balance of Trade

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for trade in *(a)* good, *(b)* good and services and *(c)* on a balance of payment basis, what was (i) the trade balance for each EU country with the rest of the EU country with the rest of the EU in each year from 1990 to 1995, in real terms and in millions of pounds, (ii) the trade balance for each EU country with the rest of the world outside the EU in years 1990 to 1995 in real terms and in millions of pounds and (iii) the trade balance for each EU country with the whole world expressed as (1) a percentage of GDP between 1990 and 1995 and (2) in real terms and in millions of pounds. [40729]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 16 October 1996]:* The complete data requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, for EU(12) countries, statistics on the balance of trade in goods split by intra-EU and extra-EU can be obtained from Eurostat's Comext CD ROM. Comparable figures for the three new members can be obtained from the International Monetary Fund's "Direction of Trade Statistics". The EU(15) balance of trade in goods and services with the world, and GDP estimates can be obtained from OECD national accounts, volume 1. All these publications are available in the Library of the House. The EU(12) trade balance in services is published in Eurostat's "International Trade in Services" up to 1993.

Nuclear Energy

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the difference in billions of pounds between the assets of those advanced gas-cooled reactors and pressurised water reactors that have been privatised and the remuneration of all kinds that the Exchequer has derived from those privatisations. [40726]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 16 October 1996]:* At the time of privatisation, British Energy had net assets of some £1.5 billion, as shown on page 87 of the British Energy share offer prospectus. Proceeds from the sale of British Energy, including the repayment of debt but excluding the value of the remaining shares held by the Secretary of State on behalf of the Government, will be some £1.8 billion. Further proceeds will be generated by the future sale of the retained shares in British Energy, which have a value of about £180 million at the issue price.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

International War Crimes Court

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy in respect of the establishment of a permanent international war crimes court. [41307]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly. Copies of the letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

ENVIRONMENT

Radioactive Scale (Disposal)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provisions exist for the offshore disposal of radioactive scale arising from oil exploration and drilling in the North sea and Atlantic. [41251]

Mr. Clappison: Discharge of naturally radioactive scale from oil exploration and drilling in UK waters is regulated under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993, as amended. The Environment Agency is the regulator for the English and Welsh sectors. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency is the regulator for the Scottish sector.

World Conservation Congress

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution his Department made to the World Conservation Congress held in Montreal this month; if his Department was represented at the congress; and what plans he has to assess the conclusions of the congress. [41252]

Mr. Clappison: The UK is a state member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. Officials from my Department are leading the UK delegation at the World Conservation Congress which began on 13 October and will finish on 23 October. My Department contributed towards the costs of the UK IUCN committee's report on the UK's contribution to IUCN 1994 to 1996, which will be launched during the congress.

PRIME MINISTER

Government Policies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister what new policy proposals were announced by Ministers of Her Majesty's Government in the week beginning 7 October; and if he will indicate which of them will be subject to compliance cost assessments. [40801]

The Prime Minister: The Government prepare a compliance cost assessment for all new legislation likely to have an impact on business and the voluntary sector. The Government's legislative programme will be presented to the House on 23 October. Compliance costs assessments will be presented in due course for the Bills in the programme.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Prime Minister what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41173]

The Prime Minister: For these purposes my Office is part of the Cabinet Office, Office of Public Service. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will write to the hon. Member.

Unidentified Flying Objects

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister if he will allocate to a department the assessments of the non–air defence implications associated with unidentified flying objects; and if he will make a statement. [40822]

The Prime Minister: The air defence and air traffic implications of unidentified flying objects are the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence and the Civil Aviation Authority respectively. The Government have no plans to allocate resources to researching extraterrestrial phenomena.

Terrorist Damage

Mr. Soley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will extend the Northern Ireland compensation scheme for terrorist attacks to mainland Britain. [40934]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham), by my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade on 27 June 1996, *Official Report*, column *202*.

New Buildings and Premises

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by his Department and its agencies; and if he will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41148]

The Prime Minister: For the purposes of this question, my Office is part of the Cabinet Office, Office of Public Service. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my right hon. Friend, the Paymaster General.

British Beef

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he is taking to encourage the purchase and use of British beef by Government Departments. [41308]

The Prime Minister: The best way to encourage use of British beef is to restore confidence in the product. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has launched an initiative to reassure consumers and those responsible for procurement about the rigorous enforcement of the control measures introduced to protect public health. The Meat and Livestock Commission is continuing with its successful campaign to promote consumption.

WALES

GP Salaries

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has and what consultations he has set up on the introduction of a salaried status scheme for general practice. [40668]

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* Proposals for the development of primary care health services, including a salaried option for general practitioners, are set out in the White Paper "Choice and Opportunity", Cm 3390, published on 15 October. This issue is also addressed in the document "Primary Care: The Way Forward in Wales", also published on

15 October, which reflects the views put forward in the Principality during the wide-ranging consultation exercise which preceded the White Paper.

Copies of both documents have been placed in the Library of the House.

School Overcrowding

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance he has published to prevent overcrowding in schools. [41196]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Non-statutory guidance, produced by the Department for Education and Employment, entitled "Area Guidelines for Schools (Building Bulletin 82)" was published on 6 September 1996.

GCSE Scores

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of States for Wales what percentage of total school leavers in the maintained sector failed to attain five GCSEs at grades A or C in each of the last five years *(a)* in total and *(b)* broken down by gender. [41197]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is contained in the following table.

Percentage of school leavers, aged 15 and above[1], from maintained schools[2], leaving without 5 GCSEs at grades A(A) to C*

	All pupils	*Boys*	*Girls*
1990–91	69	73	65
1991–92	62	66	58
1992–93	60	65	56
1993–94	58	63	53
1994–95	60	65	55

Source:
Schools Examinations Survey (1990–91) and RD1 survey (1991–92 to 1994–95).

Notes:
[1] Age as at 31 August.
[2] Excludes pupils in special schools.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what capacity of electricity used in his Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans he has to increase that capacity. [41310]

Mr. Hague: None. We review our energy costs regularly, and have concluded that a combined heat and power plant would not be cost-effective for any of the Welsh Office estate.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what representations he has received concerning the change programme in the Benefits Agency; and if he will make a statement; [41273]

(2) what plans he has to meet the Civil and Public Services Association to discuss the change programme of the Benefits Agency; and if he will make a statement. [41274]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

Disabled People

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements are in place in *(a)* Blaenau Gwent and *(b)* Wales generally to support school leavers with physical disabilities with day care facilities. [41299]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: There were seven day centres in Blaenau Gwent in 1995—the latest year for which figures are available—offering a total of 600 places for mixed groups. The number of places specifically available to people with a physical disability was not reported.

In Wales as a whole, there were 249 day centres offering 2,500 places per week for people with physical disabilities and 5,300 for mixed groups which may include physically disabled people.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will investigate the adequacy of the application of the all-Wales strategy for support for those with severe disabilities in Blaenau Gwent. [41301]

Mr. Evans: We have no plans to undertake an investigation of Blaenau Gwent's discharge of its social services functions. The Welsh Office will be receiving the normal monitoring information on the authority's use of the mental handicap strategy funding.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the arrangement in place under the new unitary authorities in Wales for the application of the all-Wales strategy for care of the disabled. [41303]

Mr. Evans: Social Services Inspectorate Wales has published a report entitled "Local Government Reorganisation Personal Social Services Monitoring Exercise: Overview Report" a copy of which is in the Library of the House. The Welsh Office has met all the unitary authorities to discuss their arrangements for discharging their social services functions.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average waiting period for local authorities in Wales to provide funding allocation for severely handicapped school leavers under the all-Wales strategy. [41300]

Mr. Evans: This information is not held centrally. Local authorities have the responsibility for the planning and commissioning of community care, including care and support for school leavers. This includes care and support for individuals with a learning disability and funding allocated to authorities under the mental handicap strategy.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what review he has made of the home care provisions for the handicapped in Wales. [41302]

Mr. Evans: Local authorities are responsible for arranging community care services, including domiciliary care, to meet local needs. They are required to publish social care plans each year for the provision of community care services in their area.

Speech Therapists

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many additional speech therapists have been recruited since 1992; [41260]

(2) how many additional speech therapists have been recruited since 1992 with the capacity to practise in the Welsh language; [41261]

(3) how many speech therapists have the ability to practise in the Welsh language. [41262]

Mr. Hague: The number of speech therapists who have been recruited is not collected centrally. The following table shows the staff in post on 30 September for each of the last four years. Due to the use of local payscales, however, there are small numbers of staff within the scientific and professional pay group who cannot be allocated to a particular occupation and these staff—some of whom may be speech therapists—are excluded from the figures. Information on the number of speech therapists who can practise in Welsh is not available.

Whole-time equivalent number of speech therapists in post at 30 September

	Number
1992	168
1993	177
1994	180
1995	199

Organophosphates

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the agricultural use of organophosphates in Wales. [41298]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible, and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what capacity of electricity used in his Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans he has to increase that capacity. [41325]

Mr. Streeter: None of the electricity used by my Department is generated by combined heat and power plant. There are no plans to utilise this form of energy in the foreseeable future.

Land Registry

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on what date the visit by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Land Registry in Plymouth on 18 September was first discussed by his Department. [40932]

Mr. Streeter: The visit to Plymouth Land Registry was first discussed on 4 June 1996.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the reasons for the recent fall in the caseload of magistrates courts in south Westminster; and if he will make a statement. [41063]

Mr. Streeter: Over the past three years the main areas of work of the magistrates courts in south Westminster showing a reduction have been the number of charges brought and laying of information for summonses by the Metropolitan police, and the number of parking offences processed by the magistrates courts.

Court Closures

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the *(a)* magistrates and *(b)* other courts which have closed in the county of South Yorkshire in each of the past five years. [40906]

Mr. Streeter: There have been no magistrate, or Crown court closures in the last five years in South Yorkshire. The Thorne county court closed on 4 January 1994.

Legal Aid

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the number of legal aid applications received from members of the public in South Yorkshire, for each of the last five years, indicating the total sums involved. [40968]

Mr. Streeter: It is not possible to identify separately applications for legal aid received from residents of South Yorkshire; the Legal Aid Board area office in Leeds covers the county of South Yorkshire along with 10 other counties or regions.

The total number of applications received for civil legal aid by the Leeds area office over the last five years were as follows:

1991–92: 42,954
1992–93: 53,084
1993–94: 48,586
1994–95: 53,278
1995–96: 54,436

The net cost of civil legal aid certificates issued by the Leeds area office, in respect of cases which closed during the last four years, were as follows:

1992–93: £19,076,615
1993–94: £26,465,169
1994–95: £32,581,004
1995–96: £36,343,203

Expenditure figures for 1991–92 are not available.

Applications for criminal legal aid are dealt with by the courts. Equivalent figures for criminal legal aid are therefore not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Benefit Fraud Hotline

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what redress will be

available to a victim of a false, malicious communication to the Department of Social Security's Benefits Agency's shop–a–benefit–fraudster hotline; and if he will make a statement. [40887]

Mr. Streeter: Any redress available to people about whom such communications will have been made will depend on the nature of any harm suffered. This will vary from case to case, and it is not possible to give a general statement of what remedy would be available. Anyone who has suffered harm as a result of such communications would have to obtain legal advice. The Government are determined to crack down on benefit fraud.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41181]

Mr. Streeter: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

New Buildings and Premises

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by his Department and its agencies; and if he will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41141]

Mr. Streeter: The information shows the square footage of new office space acquired during the period requested. The information reflects space acquired for departmental headquarters offices, associated offices, the Public Trust Office and the Courts Service.

1993–94: 426.6 sqm

1994–95: 4573.41 sqm

1995–96: 13,316 sqm (together with nominal holdings for the General Commissioners of Income tax in buildings in Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Bristol and London transferred from the Inland Revenue)

1996–97: 2551.7 sqm (transferred to LCD under the provisions of the Efficiency Scrutiny of Civil Estate)

I regret that it has not been possible before Prorogation to provide details of the space acquired by the Court Service outside its headquarters. I will write to the hon. Member with these details for the period until 1 April 1995. The chief executive of the Court Service will reply in relation to the period after 1 April 1995, when the Court Service became an executive agency. The chief executives of Her Majesty's Land Registry and the Public Record Office will also reply separately after Prorogation. Copies of all these letters will be placed in the Library.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what capacity of electricity used in his Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans he has to increase that capacity. [41318]

Mr. Willetts: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41172]

Mr. Willetts: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41174]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Promotional Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much his Department has spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotions, and *(c)* hospitality in each of the last six years. [40622]

Mr. Willetts *[holding answer 16 October 1996]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Public Services

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what improvements have been made in key public services and to regeneration projects following Government capital investment since 1979. [41333]

Mr. Freeman: I have today deposited in the Library of the House available information and statistics on investments in schools, roads, hospitals and regeneration since 1979.

Deregulation

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress there has been in removing unnecessary burdens on business under the deregulation programme. [41334]

Mr. Freeman: Over 750 regulations have been repealed or amended in the last three years, 420 in the last 12 months, with about 350 further regulations to be repealed or amended by the end of 1996.

The Government also announced a number of new measures including several in response to the second report by the deregulation task force on 23 September. These included:

consultation on the recommendation by the task force to exempt small businesses from unfair dismissal legislation for new employees;

distribution to over 200,000 businesses through key business organisations of a green card setting out new rights under business-friendly enforcement procedures. These procedures are already being used in key areas such as health and safety, food safety and the new Environment Agency and are being extended;

commitment to reduce the burden of Government surveys by up to 26 per cent. by 2000 as recommended by Edward Osmotherly;

a pilot for an automated telephone calculation service for new employers making it easier to work out PAYE and NIC deductions;

a pilot by selected local authorities of a "one-stop shop" giving a single point of contact for all development approvals under their responsibility; and the abolition or simplification of 67 business licences including the scrapping of seven of HM Customs and Excise's eight licensing or registration requirements.

Copies of the deregulation task force's report, the Osmotherly report on statistical surveys, the Government's responses to those reports and the green card have been placed in the House Libraries.

DEFENCE

Skin Cancer (Falkland Islands)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the risk of skin cancer for service men in the Falklands as a result of perceived changes in the ozone layer; and what precautions he has initiated. [40708]

Mr. Soames: There is no evidence of health problems amongst service men or their families from ultraviolet light in the Falkland Islands.

Personnel deploying to the Falkland Islands are briefed on the risk of ultraviolet light exposure to the skin. Regular news bulletins warn of the daily risk, with personnel being advised to use high factor sun block and to cover up with long sleeve shirts and wide-brimmed hats. There is an environmental health team based at Mount Pleasant which regularly monitors the risk of all environmental health factors on the Falkland Islands.

Anti-depressants (Female Recruits)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how many female recruits in the armed services anti-depressants have been prescribed since the start of training, in the last year. [40770]

Mr. Soames: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41175]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Individual budget holders in my Department have delegated powers to employ external consultants as they think fit within the limit of their resources and consistent with all requirements for propriety and value for money. The information required has therefore not hitherto been held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Furthermore, external consultants may be engaged by budget holders for assistance on a wide range of problems, but very seldom with the sole specific aim of securing financial savings.

My officials have now begun to collect data from all areas of the Department to establish the total expenditure on external consultancy. The exercise covering financial year 1995–96 was completed earlier this year and revealed that expenditure by the Department, including its agencies, in that period was £150.8 million. I wrote on 21 June 1996 to the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House, giving a breakdown of this expenditure.

A similar exercise will be undertaken to show expenditure during 1996–97. Once the information is to hand I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Gulf War Syndrome

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the extent of use of organophosphate insecticides by British forces during the Gulf war; how many troops sprayed these pesticides; what items were sprayed by the insecticides; where were the insecticides purchased; what research his Department had carried out *(a)* before the Gulf war and *(b)* after the Gulf war into the health implications of using organophosphates; and what advice was given by his Department during the Gulf war to service personnel spraying the insecticides. [41112]

Mr. Soames: These questions will be fully covered in the investigation I have already announced.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list all the pesticides, together with the quantities, used by British troops during the Gulf war; [41253]

(2) if he will list the vaccines given to British forces before they were deployed to the Gulf war; [41254]

(3) if he will make a statement on the tests carried out by his Department on pyridostigmine bromide before its use in the Gulf war. [41255]

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if his Department's current investigations into the cause of Gulf war syndrome include research into the possible contribution made by the inhalation of uranium dust arising from the use of depleted uranium armour-piercing shells; [41295]

(2) which delousing agents were used to treat Iraqi prisoners captured during Operation Granby in the Gulf war; and what health protective measures were taken for *(a)* the British Army medical service and *(b)* the Iraqi prisoners from inadvertent inhalation ingestion or skin contamination; [41304]

(3) what research has been conducted on behalf of his Department by the national poisons information service into the causes of Gulf war syndrome. [41292]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Members and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Nicholas Pope

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what post Mr. Nicholas Pope was appointed by his Department after his tour of duty with Secretariat (Air Staff) Department 2A; and if he will make a statement. [40920]

Mr. Soames: Mr. Nicholas Pope was posted on promotion two years ago to a general finance policy branch.

Uranium-tipped Shells

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the current risk posed to civilians from exploded depleted uranium-tipped shells in Kuwait. [41101]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department has conducted no formal assessment of the risks to civilians from exploded depleted uranium-tipped ammunition in Kuwait.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the risk to soldiers of handling depleted uranium-tipped shells. [41100]

Mr. Soames: Depleted uranium has a very low level of radioactivity and the risks attached to the handling of depleted uranium ammunition are minimal.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the 1991 Atomic Energy Authority report on industrial technology concerning the risk of exposure to exploded depleted uranium-tipped shells. [41102]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the letter sent by my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 7 August 1996, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many depleted uranium-tipped shells were fired by British forces during the Gulf war; and what assessment he has made of the number of exploded shells remaining in Kuwait. [41099]

Mr. Soames: British forces fired some 88 depleted uranium shells during the Gulf conflict. The Ministry of Defence has made no assessment of the number of exploded shells remaining in Kuwait, as we judge the risk to human health posed by DU rounds to be negligible. It is likely, though, that a large proportion of the 88 shells was expended in Iraq rather than Kuwait.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies have been conducted by his Department into the nephrotoxicity of the inhalation of uranium particles. [41296]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Married Quarters Estate

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the locations of the houses from the married quarters estate that have been released to Arrington Homes for immediate use by the private sector. [40931]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

RAF Rudloe Manor

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work is currently undertaken at RAF Rudloe Manor; what work was undertaken in the last 10 years; what was, by rank, the establishment for the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [40823]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Defence Intelligence Branches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the current function of DI55 SIG; what was its function *(a)* five years and *(b)* 10 years ago; and if he will make a statement; [41040]

(2) what is the current function of DI65B; what was its function *(a)* five years and *(b)* 10 years ago; and if he will make a statement; [41038]

(3) what is the current function of DI55; what was its function *(a)* five years and *(b)* 10 years ago; and if he will make a statement; [41041]

(4) what is the current function of DI61E; what was its function *(a)* five years and *(b)* 10 years ago; and if he will make a statement; [41037]

(5) what is the current function of DI10; what was its function *(a)* five years and *(b)* 10 years ago; and if he will make a statement. [41039]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Unidentified Flying Objects

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what consultation has taken place in each of the last five years by his Department with the French Ministry of Defence Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales in respect of unidentified flying objects; and if he will make a statement; [41048]

(2) if a lodger unit housed within his Department's Flying Complaints Flight specialises in unidentified flying object investigations; and if he will make a statement; [41036]

(3) how many records currently held by his Department's Scientific Intelligence Branch are under extended closure for *(a)* 50 years, *(b)* 75 years and *(c)* 100 years; how many of these records refer to unidentified flying objects; and if he will make a statement; [40911]

(4) what consultation has taken place in each of the last five years by his Department with the Royal Australian air force in respect of unidentified flying objects; and if he will make a statement; [41042]

(5) what consultation has taken place in each of the last five years by his Department with the Spanish Ministry of Defence's intelligence section of the Spanish air forces air operations command in respect of unidentified flying objects; and if he will make a statement; [41050]

(6) if he will make statement on his Department's policy towards unidentified flying objects and on how this has developed during the past 30 years; [40913]

(7) what co-operation there is between the Royal Air Force and the United States air force in respect of establishing the facts relating to unidentified flying objects; and if he will make a statement; [40918]

(8) how many alleged landings by unidentified flying objects have been recorded in each year since 1980 and this year to date; how many have been investigated by his Department's personnel; which of these had been traced by radar and with what result; and if he will make a statement; [40921]

(9) what consultation has taken place in each of the last five years by his Department with the Italian Ministry of Defence air force general staff (2. Department) in respect of unidentified flying objects; and if he will make a statement; [41049]

(10) what instructions have been sent to the commanders of Royal Air Force stations to collect reports from air crews having allegedly sighted unidentified flying objects; what inquiries have been held following such sightings; to what extent there has been collaboration between his Department and departments in *(a)* Canada and *(b)* the United States of America on this problem; and if he will make a statement; [40917]

(11) what consultation has taken place in each of the last five years by his Department with New Zealand's Ministry of Defence in respect of unidentified flying objects; and if he will make a statement; [41043]

(12) what consultation has taken place in each of the last five years by his Department with the Portuguese Ministry of Defence's joint staff of the armed forces intelligence division in respect of unidentified flying objects; and if he will make a statement; [41051]

(13) how many instances of unidentified flying objects have been reported on by the defence services of the United Kingdom during the last 12 months; what steps are taken to co-ordinate such observations; and if he will make a statement; [40910]

(14) if he will list by year for the last 30 years how many structured craft of unknown origin have penetrated the United Kingdom's air defence region; and if he will make a statement. [40919]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Tornado Crash (Blackpool)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral statement of 14 October, *Official Report*, column 476, on what date the F3 Tornado which crashed on Blackpool beach in September, received its certificate of airworthiness. [41070]

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 14 October, *Official Report*, column 484, by whom the investigation into the crash of the Tornado F3 off Blackpool on 28 September will be carried out. [41336]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Tornado F3 that crashed near Blackpool on 28 September 1996 had been authorised to fly by the Ministry of Defence on the same day as the accident.

The authorisation was issued, at British Aerospace Warton where the aircraft was being refurbished, in accordance with standard procedures for aircraft undergoing such work.

The aircraft which crashed was the ninth of a series of 16 aircraft being refurbished by British Aerospace. The previous eight had already been returned to the RAF in fully operational condition.

A Ministry of Defence board of inquiry is under way into the causes of the crash and not one by the Department of Transport as suggested by my right hon. Friend on 14 October, *Official Report*, column 484.

New Buildings and Premises

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by his Department and its agencies; and if he will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41147]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Armed Forces (Strength)

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the strength of the British armed forces on 1 April 1992; and what will be its strength on *(a)* 1 April 1999 and *(b)* 1 April 2000. [41111]

Mr. Soames: The total service strength of the regular armed forces on 1 April 1992 was 302,400. The estimated strength on 1 April 1999 and 1 April 2000 is 213,500 for each year. Both figures include Gurkha strengths, Royal Marines and Queen Alexandra Royal Naval Nursing Service, and an element for personnel undergoing training.

HMS Sceptre

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the result of his Department's investigations into an incident on board HMS Sceptre on 22 July; and if he will make a statement. [40835]

Mr. Soames: The Royal Navy board of inquiry into the incident on 22 July, when two peace demonstrators were apprehended shortly after gaining access to HMS Sceptre, identified the need to tighten certain aspects of the specific security procedures relating to our nuclear hunter killer submarines. This has been done. It also recommended a number of additional security and

management measures to minimise the possibility of such an incident happening again. Many of these have already been put in place, and others are being addressed with the greatest urgency.

Mr. Nicholas Redfern

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the titles of the records of the Ministry of Defence's scientific intelligence branch in respect of correspondence sent to Mr. Nicholas Redfern by the Public Record Office, Kew on 21 September 1990. [40889]

Mr. Soames: I will write to hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library in the House.

Peninsula Barracks, Winchester

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether his Department entered into an agreement with the developers of Peninsula barracks, Winchester, so that his Department could share in any gain arising from development; and if he will make a statement; [41227]

(2) if he will set out *(a)* the purchase and *(b)* the sale price of Peninsula barracks, Winchester. [41228]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what capacity of electricity used in his Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans he has to increase that capacity. [41317]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Foreign Police Officers (Powers)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by what authority *(a)* members of visiting forces and *(b)* US security police officers arrest and detain United Kingdom citizens on public highways for (i) theft and (ii) other alleged offences against United Kingdom law. [41328]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Epidemiology Research Proposals

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 July to the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie), *Official Report*, columns *532–33*, if he will now make a statement on the outcome of the Medical Research Council selection process on the 37 outline proposals for research into Gulf war syndrome mentioned in his answer. [41306]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Gulf War (Pesticides)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if the organophosphate pesticide Denenton–S–Methyl was used by his Department's medical personnel in Operation Granby in the Gulf war; [41293]

(2) pursuant to the letter from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, on 4 October, if he will now correct his answer of 11 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *436*, on the use of pesticides during the Gulf war. [41294]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Euratom Treaty

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what activities of his Department come within the scope of the Euratom treaty. [41297]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

War Graves (France)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the desecration of war graves in northern France. [41256]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

RAF Sealand

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects a decision on the market testing bids at RAF Sealand; and if he will make a statement. [41257]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Dominie Aircraft Contracts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what prospects there are for the Raytheon Hawker jet work force at Broughton, Flintshire, obtaining contracts to service the MOD's Dominie aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [41258]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

A319 Tanker Airbus

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to purchase British Aerospace's planned A319 tanker airbus; and if he will make a statement. [41259]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Service Bares

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the present number of British naval bases in England and Wales; and if he will list them; [39224]

(2) what is the present number of British Army bases in England and Wales; and if he will list; [39226]

(3) what is the present number of Royal Air Force bases in England and Wales; and if he will list them. [39223]

Mr. Soames: I shall write to my hon. Friend and a copy of the reply will be placed in the Library of the House.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Attorney-General what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41176]

The Attorney-General: The latest estimates of expenditure on external consultants for the departments and agencies for which I am responsible are set out in the table in 1996 prices. The legal secretariat to the Law Officers has not incurred any such expenditure. External consultants were engaged primarily to advise on matters of management or to develop new systems and, while their advice is considered to have contributed very significantly to efficiency, it is not possible to quantify the annual cost savings attributable to this expenditure.

£ thousand

Department	*1992-93*	*1993-94*	*1994-95*	*1995-96*
Crown Prosecution Service	713	722	719	696
Serious Fraud Office	123	159	373	278
Treasury Solicitor's Department	367	456	131	148
Government Property Lawyers Agency	-	7	21	17

TRANSPORT

Driving Tests

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list, by Driving Standards Agency regional office, the number of application forms currently awaiting a booking date, the time it currently takes to answer a telephone call and the current average waiting time for a driving test application to be processed. [40688]

Mr. Bowis: At 30 September the numbers of driving test application forms awaiting processing in each of the Driving Standards Agency Area Offices were:

Area office	*Number*
London and South East	1,689
Midlands and Eastern	1,640
Wales and Western	1,504
Northern	1,420
Scotland	201
National	6,454

The agency's target for telephone answering has been for 90 per cent. of calls to be answered within 60 seconds. The results for the week ending 27 September were:

Area office	*Number of calls answered*	*In 60 seconds (per cent.)*
London and South East	22,097	70
Midlands and Eastern	14,774	31
Wales and Western	12,894	88
Northern	17,722	96
Scotland	5,591	92
Total	73,078	75

The average number of days between receipt of valid application and issue of appointment cards at the start of October is estimated to be:

Area office	*Average number of days*
London and South east	5
Midland and Eastern	4
Wales and Western	5
Northern	3
Scotland	3
Average	4

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the average waiting times for driving tests for each of the past 18 months. [40693]

Mr. Bowis: The average waiting times for driving tests between March 1995 and August 1996 are shown in the table.

Weeks

	Cars	*Motorcycles*	*Lorry/bus*
1995			
March	6.4	4.3	3.3
April	6.7	4.7	3.0
May	7.3	5.8	3.0
June	7.5	5.8	2.9
July	7.6	6.1	3.0
August	8.0	6.6	3.0
September	7.7	5.9	3.2
October	7.6	5.3	3.3
November	8.0	5.1	3.6
December	7.7	4.0	2.8
1996			
January	8.2	4.2	3.6
February	9.2	6.3	4.0
March	10.5	12	8.2
April	12.4	13.6	7.7
May	13.0	14.6	7.6
June	11.7	14.5	7.1
July	10.4	14.5	6.6
August	9.9	14.4	6.3

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if candidates undertaking driving tests are required to provide a signed driving licence before undertaking their test. [40703]

Mr. Bowis: Driving test candidates are required to present their signed driving licence at the start of a driving test as evidence of identity and driver status, though examiners have the discretion to allow the test to proceed if otherwise satisfied that the licence exists.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the numbers of people *(a)* passing and *(b)* failing driving tests at driving test centres by location from 1 July to the latest convenient date; and what percentage change these figures represent over those for (i) 12 and (ii) 24 months previously. [40443]

Mr. Bowis: I will write to the hon. Member.

Oxygenated Fuel

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the potential environmental benefits of oxygenated fuel; and if he will make a statement. [40717]

Mr. Bowis: An assessment by the Department of Transport has shown that increasing the quantity of oxygenates in petrol can result in reduced emissions, primarily carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons, through more complete combustion of the fuel in the engine. The assessment also showed that the addition of oxygen to petrol as an alternative octane booster allows for a reduction in benzene in the fuel, but at the expense of increased aldehyde emissions.

City Diesel

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the potential environmental benefits of the use of city diesel; and if he will make a statement. [40719]

Mr. Bowis: The Government are currently considering the role that cleaner fuels, including ultra low-sulphur diesels such as "city diesel", might play in minimising road transport emissions. To that end "city diesel" is included in the continuing comparative trials of cleaner or alternative fuels which the Government are sponsoring. The trials will provide an indication of both the emissions reduction potential of such fuels and of their practicality and cost-effectiveness in comparison with conventional fuels.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the potential environmental benefits of city diesel. [40718]

Mr. Bowis: Representations about the potential environmental benefits of city diesel and of a number of other alternative or cleaner fuels have been received from a number of bodies including fuel producers and retailers, operators, local authorities and environmental groups.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those structures on *(a)* the M1, *(b)* the M6, *(c)* the M5 and *(d)* the M25 which fail to meet the standards for 44 tonne heavy goods vehicles. [40683]

Mr. Watts: I will write to the hon. Member.

Trust Ports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each trust port *(a)* its date of privatisation, *(b)* the sale price and *(c)* its current value as listed on the stock exchange. [40701]

Mr. Bowis: The month of sale and price of each of the privatised trust ports are shown below. Stock exchange listings do not provide comparable data: not all the ports were listed after privatisation, and several are now part of larger port groups.

Proceeds from the sale of trust ports

Port	*Sale Price £ million*	*Date of sale*
Tees and Hartlepool	180.00	January 1992
Clyde	26.00	March 1992
Forth	112.70	March 1992
Medway	29.70	March 1992
Tilbury	32.00	March 1992
Dundee	18.05	November 1995

Roads Programme

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of the last five years the budget for *(a)* re-signing, *(b)* landscaping and *(c)* lighting in the overall roads programme budget. [40700]

Mr. Watts: I will write to the hon. Member.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will update the figures and information given in his answer of 16 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns *75-80*, in respect of road schemes completed for the last six years in respect of all projects; if he will identify which have been completed in the last 12 months; and what in each case was the average overrun. [40739]

Mr. Watts: I will write to the hon. Member.

Southend Test Centre

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that the test centre in Southend will remain in operation for the foreseeable future. [41192]

Mr. Bowis: The Driving Standards Agency has no current plans to cease operations from its driving test centre in Southend.

Traffic Congestion

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 26 February to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), *Official Report*, column *340*, if he will now update the congestion or stress maps which were placed in the Library by producing a regional map showing more detailed forecasts of congestion for trunk roads in the north-west of England, with particular reference to key links on the motorway network in the region. [41243]

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 26 February, to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), *Official*

Report, column *340*, if he will now update the congestion or stress maps which were placed in the Library by producing a regional map showing more detailed forecasts of congestion for trunk roads in the midlands, with particular reference to key links on the motorway network in the region. [41242]

Mr. Watts: I have asked my officials to produce regional maps as requested covering each of the English regions and to place copies in the Library of the House within four weeks.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41189]

Mr. Bowis: In each of the financial years from 1992–93 to 1995–96 the expenditure on external consultants, at 1996–97 prices, was as follows:

Financial year	*Expenditure £ million*
1992–93	226
1993–94	253
1994–95	208
1995–96	176

It is not possible to quantify the annual cost savings resulting from this expenditure.

Aviation (Unauthorised Landings)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reports he has received of unauthorised landings from the air during the last 12 months over *(a)* South, *(b)* West, *(c)* North Yorkshire and *(d)* Humberside; and if he will make a statement. [40832]

Mr. Bowis: It is not clear to what sort of landings the hon. Gentlemen is referring.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what capacity of electricity used in his Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans he has to increase that capacity. [41312]

Mr. Bowis: None.

Roads (Litter)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the reduction in grass cutting and litter clearance on trunk roads in urban areas. [40940]

Mr. Watts: I will write to the hon. Member.

Transport Council

Mr. MacGregor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the outcome of the Transport Council held in Luxembourg on 3 and 4 October. [41344]

Sir George Young: The Transport Council met in Luxembourg on 3 and 4 October. My hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads represented the United Kingdom.

The only item before the Council for decision was a proposal for negotiations with 10 central and eastern European countries on agreements aimed at integrating these countries' air transport markets with that of the Community. This was agreed. The Council met Transport Ministers from the 10 countries, as part of the agreed strategy of "structured relations" with these countries to help prepare them for EU membership. The discussion concentrated on the development of railways and combined transport.

The Commission reported on progress in the negotiations for land and air transport agreements between the Community and Switzerland.

The Council debated the Commission's White Paper on the future of the Community's railways. The United Kingdom welcomed the emphasis in the paper on greater commercialisation, the further separation of infrastructure and operations and open access for freight services.

The Council debated a draft directive on heavy goods vehicle taxation and road user charging, intended as a replacement for the existing directive, which has been annulled by the European Court of Justice. The Council also considered two proposals for further liberalisation of bus and coach services. The Council discussed a draft regulation on air transport, to extend and harmonise air carrier's liability in case of death or injury to passengers, and a draft directive on maritime safety, to introduce a harmonised safety regime for fishing vessels over 24m. It is planned that there should be further discussions at official level on all these proposals before the next Transport Council.

The United Kingdom presented a paper to the Council urging further work on methods of transferring the costs of marine infrastructure, such as navigational aids, from state budgets to users of the services provided. The Commission said that it would continue to look at this issue.

Other issues raised at the Council include aviation safety, air traffic management, and combined transport.

HEALTH

Tampons

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has given to tampon manufacturers in respect of overnight safety of products. [40740]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all

external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41177]

Mr. Horam: Expenditure on all external consultants for the Department and its agencies for the years 1992–93 to 1995–96 in—1995–96 prices— is shown in the list. External consultants are used to assist in improving efficiency and effectiveness in the Department, but it is not possible to assess the savings which are a direct consequence of their activity.

1992–93: £19.732 million

1993–94: £16.611 million

1994–95: £18.927 million

1995–96: £18.363 million.

Dengue Fever Vaccine

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into a vaccine against dengue fever; and if he will make a statement. [40861]

Mr. Horam: Information on research commissioned by the Department of Health is contained in "The Centrally Commissioned Research Programme" and "The Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commissions in 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

Work on developing a vaccine against dengue has been underway for several years. Although recent work is encouraging, much further work is required.

Hepatitis

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on vaccination against hepatitis B. [41055]

Mr. Horam: The United Kingdom has one of the lowest prevalence rates of hepatitis B carriers in the world and the Department's current policy is to recommend immunisation against hepatitis B for those groups at increased risk of infection because of their life style, occupation or other factors such as close contact with a case or carrier. This policy, including the risk groups for whom immunisation is recommended, is kept under review.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average expenditure per head in *(a)* each health authority and *(b)* nationally in the last financial year for which figures are available. [41332]

Mr. Horam: Per capita spend for each district health authority in 1994–95, the latest financial year available, has been placed in the Library.

The average per capita expenditure by district health authorities in England in 1994–95 was £383.

Comparisons of these per capita spend figures need to be treated with caution. First, not all the expenditure covered arises from population related activities. Secondly, crude populations do not reflect differences in age structure or relative health care need. These differences feature in the formulae used to inform the main allocations to the former district health authorities.

Mesothelioma

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information relating to mesothelioma his Department distributes to general practitioners for issue to patients who have worked with asbestos. [41335]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

Cervical Smears

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many cervical cancer screening tests were carried out in each nation, region and health authority area in each year since 1990 with, in each case, the percentage of such tests requiring follow-up; [41339]

(2) if he will place in the Library all guidance he has issued about the adequacy and competence of cervical cancer screening tests; [41340]

(3) what guidance he has issued as to the acceptance by NHS pathologists as adequate cervical cancer screening test record cards that do not confirm that visual inspection has taken place; [41341]

(4) what representations he has received as to the adequacy of cervical cancer screening where no visual inspection of the cervix has taken place. [41342]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 14 October, *Official Report*, column *755–56* (1) what is the total revenue payment in the current financial year to which his Department is committed in respect of projects funded under the private finance initiative; [41345]

(2) what total revenue payment in respect of national health service projects funded under the private finance initiative he projected for the current financial year at the time of the 1995 Budget; [41346]

(3) what total revenue payment in respect of national health service projects funded under the private finance initiative he now projects for the current financial year; [41347]

(4) what is the total revenue payment so far in the current financial year for national health service projects funded under the private finance initiative. [41348]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

Health Service Deficits

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each district health authority serving the Greater London area for each of the financial years 1996-97 and 1997-98 and subsequent years for which figures can be given *(a)* the recurrent deficit, *(b)* the non-recurrent surplus or deficit, *(c)* movement in balances, *(d)* the cash deficit and *(e)* those cash deficits expressed as a percentage of revenue or expenditure. [40794]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 16 October 1996]:* The information is not available in precisely the form requested. A table based on figures supplied by health authorities at the end of the first quarter of 1996-97 will be placed in the Library shortly. This sets out the forecast outturn position for each health authority including those serving the Greater London area, for 1996-97. These are shown as a percentage of each authority's income, and the forecast movement in balances in the year is also shown. We do not anticipate there being cash deficits as the system of brokerage between health authorities is expected to avoid these. Information on future years is not yet available.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he received the letter dated 31 July for the hon. Member for Newham, South concerning his failure to answer his written question requesting information on health service deficits, of 22 July; when a substantive reply was sent; and for what reason the figures requested were regarded as being unsuitable for publication. [40795]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 16 October 1996]:* The hon. Member's letter of 31 July concerning health authority deficits was received on 2 August. An initial reply was sent on 21 August. A substantive reply was sent today. At the time the question was initially asked, 22 July, the information held by the national health service executive was considered to be incomplete and therefore misleading, as it was still subject to discussion between health authorities and the NHS executive about their plans.

TREASURY

Public Expenditure

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of the new mortgage interest payments uprating; and what estimate he has made of the effect of the uprating of MIPS on the current public expenditure survey round. [40672]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* I cannot answer substantively before Parliament is prorogued. I will, however, write to the hon. Member.

Privatisation

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each Department of State those parts and their functions or operations which have been disposed of to the private sector since 1987, stating for each the sum received at their stated date of disposal and that sum in 1996 prices. [40361]

Mr. Jack: The value of asset disposals for part of or functions undertaken by Departments of State since 1987 is as follows:

Completed Central Government privatisations

Date	*Organisation*	*Department*[1]	*Proceeds £ million*
September 1988	Professional/Executive Recruitment	DE	6.0
May 1990	Skills Training Agency	DE	–10.7
December 1991	ECGD Insurance Services Group	ECGD	20.0
December 1992	PSA Projects	DOE	–49.6
September–October 1993	PSA Services (BM Scotland)		3.5
	(BM Manchester)		8.0
	(BM Noreast)		–11.5
	(BM SE/BM S&W)		10.4
December 1993	DVOIT	DoT	5.5
February 1994	FORWARD	HMT	4.6
March 1994	DTELS	HO	6.5
March 1994	Agricultural Training Board	MAFF	Nil
December 1994	NHS Scotland CSA Building Division	SO	0.37
March 1995	AEA Facilities Management	DTI	12.0
July 1995	Scottish Homes Building Division	SO	2.0
August 1995	UK Accreditation Services	DTI	Nil
November 1995	National Engineering Laboratory	DTI	–1.95
March 1996	Transport Research Laboratory	DoT	6.0
March 1996	Laboratory of Government Chemist	DTI	–0.5
March 1996	Historic Property Restoration	DNH	0.37
April 1996	Natural Resources Institute	ODA	Nil
July 1996	WHCSA Estate Care Group	WO	0.17
July 1996	Chessington Computer Centre	OPS	11.25
September 1996	AEA Technology plc	DTI	210.0
September 1996	Occupational Health/Safety Agency	OPS	0.35
September 1996	Her Majesty's Stationery Office	OPS	54.0
October 1996	Recruitment and Assessment Services	OPS	7.25
Total			294.01
Total at 1996 prices			294.44

[1] Proceeds are shown gross of costs and pension transfers, but net of payments for future restructuring costs etc.

Mortgage Lenders

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to set up a body to regulate mortgage lenders; and if he will make a statement. [40772]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Banks and building societies, which constitute the vast bulk of mortgage providers, are already regulated as deposit takers, and their customers—be they borrowers or depositors—have access to their ombudsman schemes. The Personal Investment Authority has a role in regulating firms which sell, or offer advice on, endowment mortgages. In addition, the Council of Mortgage Lenders, which represents most of the industry, has published a draft code of mortgage lending practice with a view to covering all mortgage lenders.

Landfill Tax

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if appointments to the regulatory body set up to oversee the operation of the landfill tax will be made by open competition; [40877]

(2) if he will list the environmental bodies which have made representations regarding enrolment as appropriate bodies to receive donations from landfill operators; [40875]

(3) if he will list the landfill operators in the south Yorkshire region who had registered their liability for landfill tax on 1 September; [40879]

(4) how many landfill operators in each Customs and Excise region had registered their liability as landfill operators on 1 September; [40878]

(5) if he will list the members of the regulatory body to oversee the operation of the landfill tax already appointed. [40876]

Mr. Oppenheim: I cannot answer substantively before Parliament is prorogued. I will, however, write to the hon. Member.

Tax Fraud Hotline

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set up a free phone hotline for the reporting of suspected income tax fraud; and if he will make a statement. [40830]

Mr. Jack: The Inland Revenue already has arrangements for the receipt of information, which it publicises in the local and regional press as part of its normal compliance activities, and receives a substantial amount of information from concerned members of the public. Any member of the public who wishes to report suspected tax evasion can do so by telephoning any tax office in the knowledge that all such calls are treated in strict confidence. Thus the Government have no immediate plans to introduce a specific hotline for suspected income tax fraud.

Official Residences

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions since his appointment he has made use of each of his official residences. [41329]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I live in 11 Downing street, and stay at Dorneywood from time to time.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the annual cost to the Exchequer of the management and maintenance of each of his official residences. [41330]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I cannot answer substantively before Parliament is prorogued. I will, however, write to the hon. Member.

Unemployment-related Benefits

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for those that are currently claiming unemployment-related benefits how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women for whom the interval in weeks between the latest and previous claim was (i) four or less, (ii) over four and up to 13, (iii) over 13 and up to 26, (iv) over 26 and up to 39, (v) over 39 and up to 52, (vi) over 52 and up to 104 and (vii) over 104 and those who had made no previous claim there are in (i) each standard region of England, (2) Wales, (3) Scotland and (4) Great Britain. [40902]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested is contained in the following table.

Live claims for unemployment related benefits on 12 September 1996 by the interval between the current and previous claim

Claims (thousands)

Regions	*Interval (weeks)* 4 or less	Over 4 and up to 13	Over 13 and up to 26	Over 26 and up to 39	Over 39 and up to 52	Over 52 and up to 104	Over 104	No previous	Total
Females									
South East	16.4	22.4	17.3	9.9	7.5	13.6	22.3	59.7	169.2
East Anglia	1.3	1.9	1.5	0.9	0.9	1.2	2.4	6.1	16.3
South West	3.9	5.5	4.6	2.3	1.6	2.9	5.5	13	39.3
West Midlands	3.8	5.9	4.9	2.7	2.6	3.5	6.2	18.4	48
East Midlands	2.8	4.5	3.5	1.5	1.7	2.6	4.8	11.4	32.7
Yorkshire and Humberside	4.4	5.8	4.4	2.6	2.3	2.9	5.9	16.1	44.5
North West	5.5	6.8	5.8	3.2	2.5	3.7	7.2	18.8	53.7
Northern	3	3.3	3.4	1.8	1.3	2.3	3.6	12.1	30.8
Wales	2.2	2.9	2.5	1.3	1.3	1.6	4.1	9.6	25.5
Scotland	4.6	5	4.3	2.5	3	3.2	6.4	15.6	44.6
Great Britain	48	64.1	52.3	28.6	24.8	37.6	68.4	180.9	504.6
Males									
South East	59.9	79.6	63.9	32.4	24.9	42.2	53	109.3	465.3
East Anglia	5.9	7.6	6.7	3.6	2	3.3	5.1	9	43.1

Live claims for unemployment related benefits on 12 September 1996 by the interval between the current and previous claim

Claims (thousands)

Regions	*Interval (weeks)* 4 or less	Over 4 and up to 13	Over 13 and up to 26	Over 26 and up to 39	Over 39 and up to 52	Over 52 and up to 104	Over 104	No previous	Total
South West	15.5	19.7	15.7	7.4	5.6	9.7	10.5	20.2	104.3
West Midlands	16.3	25.6	19.5	10	8.2	12.5	15.9	30.9	139
East Midlands	11.9	17.9	12.3	6.3	5.2	8.7	10.4	19.2	91.9
Yorkshire and Humberside	21.6	27.7	20.5	9.1	8.5	12.2	14.4	27.4	141.4
North West	25	32.6	25.8	12.8	9.9	16.7	19.2	36.3	178.3
Northern	13.8	19.1	14.5	7.1	6.4	9.1	9	20.6	99.6
Wales	10	13.3	12	5.4	5	7.5	9.1	15.1	77.4
Scotland	21	26.8	21.8	11	10	13.2	15	27	145.9
Great Britain	201	269.9	212.7	105.1	85.8	135.1	161.4	315.1	1,486.2
All									
South East	76.3	10.2	81.2	42.3	32.4	55.9	75.3	168.9	634.5
East Anglia	7.2	9.5	8.2	4.5	2.9	4.5	7.4	15.1	59.4
South West	19.4	25.2	20.3	9.7	7.2	12.6	16	33.2	143.6
West Midlands	20.1	31.6	24.4	12.8	10.8	16	22.1	49.3	187
East Midlands	14.6	22.4	15.9	7.7	6.9	11.3	15.2	30.6	124.7
Yorkshire and Humberside	26.1	33.5	24.9	11.7	10.8	15.1	20.3	43.5	185.8
North West	30.5	39.4	31.6	16	12.5	20.4	26.4	55.2	232
Northern	16.9	22.4	17.9	8.9	7.7	11.4	12.6	32.7	130.4
Wales	12.2	16.3	14.5	6.6	6.3	9.1	13.2	24.7	102.9
Scotland	25.6	31.8	26.2	13.5	13	16.4	21.4	42.7	190.5
Great Britain	249	334	265	133.7	110.5	172.6	229.8	495.9	1,990.8

Source:
JUVOS cohort, excludes clerically operated claims.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women currently claiming unemployment-related benefits have made (i) no previous claims, (ii) one, (iii) two, (iv) three, (v) four and (vi) five or more claims for unemployment-related benefits in (1) each standard region of England, (2) Wales, (3) Scotland and (4) Great Britain. [40900]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested is contained in the following table.

Live claims for unemployment related benefits on 12 September 1996 by the number of previous claims, Great Britain

Thousands

Region	*Number of previous claims* 0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Females							
South East	59.7	39.7	25.6	16.2	10.6	17.5	169.2
East Anglia	6.1	3.4	2.7	1.6	1	1.4	16.3
South West	13	8.8	6.1	4	2.4	5.1	39.3
West Midlands	18.4	10.6	7.2	4.6	2.6	4.6	48
East Midlands	11.4	7.9	5.1	3.1	1.9	3.4	32.7
Yorkshire and Humberside	16.1	9.6	6.6	4.3	2.7	5.1	44.5
North West	18.8	11.9	8.1	5.3	3.1	6.4	53.7
Northern	12.1	7	4.3	2.9	1.7	2.8	30.8
Wales	9.6	5.7	4	1.9	1.4	3.1	25.5
Scotland	15.6	9.8	6.3	4.6	3	5.3	44.6
Total	180.9	114.5	76	48.4	30.3	54.5	504.6
Males							
South East	109.3	98.7	76.7	58.1	40.5	82.1	465.3
East Anglia	9	7.4	6.7	5.1	3.9	11.1	43.1
South West	20.2	18.3	15.5	13.3	10.4	26.6	104.3
West Midlands	30.9	27.3	23.6	18.6	13.3	25.3	139
East Midlands	19.2	17.1	15	12	8.4	20.2	91.9
Yorkshire and Humberside	27.4	24.4	22.2	17.1	13.9	36.3	141.4
North West	36.3	31.4	28.7	21.8	18	42.1	178.3
Northern	20.6	17.6	15.7	12.3	9.8	23.5	99.6
Wales	15.1	13	11.9	9.7	7.7	19.9	77.4
Scotland	27	24.6	22.1	17.6	15.1	39.5	145.9
Total	315.1	279.9	238.1	185.6	141	326.6	1,486.2

Live claims for unemployment related benefits on 12 September 1996 by the number of previous claims, Great Britain

Thousands

Region	*Number of previous claims* 0	1	2	3	4	5	*Total*
All							
South East	168.9	138.3	102.2	74.3	51.1	99.6	634.5
East Anglia	15.1	10.9	9.4	6.7	4.9	12.5	59.4
South West	33.2	27.1	21.5	17.2	12.8	31.7	143.6
West Midlands	49.3	37.9	30.8	23.2	15.9	29.8	187
East Midlands	30.6	25	20.1	15.1	10.3	23.6	124.7
Yorkshire and Humberside	43.5	34.1	28.9	21.4	16.6	41.4	185.8
North West	55.2	43.3	36.9	27.1	21.1	48.5	232
Northern	32.7	24.6	20.1	15.2	11.4	26.4	130.4
Wales	24.7	18.7	15.9	11.6	9.1	22.9	102.9
Scotland	42.7	34.4	28.3	22.2	18.1	44.8	190.5
Total	495.9	394.3	314	234.1	171.3	381.1	1,990.8

Source:
JUVOS Cohort, computerised claims.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have made (i) one, (ii) two, (iii) three, (iv) four and (v) five or more claims for unemployment-related benefits in (1) each standard region of England, (2) Wales, (3) Scotland and (4) Great Britain since April 1992. [40903]

Mrs. Knight: The information requested is contained in the following table.

Claimants for unemployment related benefits since April 1992 by the number of claims made, Great Britain

Region	*Number of claims* 1	2	3	4	5	*Total*
Females						
South East	656.9	250.5	100.9	41.7	32.1	1,082.1
East Anglia	67.1	25.4	10.7	4.6	4.6	112.4
South West	165.1	62.6	27	12.1	10.5	277.3
West Midlands	194.7	70.4	28.7	11.8	8.5	314.1
East Midlands	137	50.8	21	8.9	6.2	224
Yorkshire and Humberside	177.2	67.5	28.6	12.9	12.1	298.3
North West	230	88	37.3	16.6	14.3	386.1
Northern	106.4	42.3	18	7.5	7.1	181.4
Wales	94.6	36.9	15.9	6.6	5.9	159.9
Scotland	190.8	72.5	32.6	15.5	14.4	325.8
Total	2,019.8	766.9	320.7	138.1	115.8	3,361.3
Males						
South East	1,031.9	524.8	257.4	122.1	104.4	2,040.7
East Anglia	102.7	49.3	27.3	14.1	19	212.4
South West	243.1	125.3	68.9	38	42.2	517.5
West Midlands	293	154.6	79.8	37.9	34.9	600.2
East Midlands	208.1	105.7	56.2	29.1	30.3	429.4
Yorkshire and Humberside	255.8	140.2	83	46.4	54	579.4
North West	346.8	192.2	104.9	56.2	59.9	760
Northern	157	94.2	55.2	30.7	39.6	376.7
Wales	141.4	78.5	46	23.8	26	315.7
Scotland	260.3	148.7	87.1	49	58.5	603.6
Total	3.039.9	1,613.5	865.9	447.3	468.7	6.435.4
South East	1,688.8	775.4	358.4	163.8	136.5	3,122.8
East Anglia	169.9	74.7	38	18.7	23.6	324.7
South West	408.2	187.9	95.9	50.1	52.6	794.8
West Midlands	487.7	225	108.6	49.6	43.4	914.3
East Midlands	345	156.5	77.2	38	36.5	653.4
Yorkshire and Humberside	433	207.7	111.6	59.3	66.1	877.7
North West	576.8	280.2	142.2	72.8	74.1	1.146.1
Northern	263.4	136.5	73.2	38.2	46.7	558.1
Wales	236	115.4	61.9	30.3	32	475.6
Scotland	451	221.2	119.7	64.5	72.9	929.4
Total	5,059.7	2,380.4	1,186.6	585.5	584.5	9,796.7

Source:
UVOS Cohort, computerised claims.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41190]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I cannot answer substantively before Parliament is prorogued. I will, however, write to the hon. Member.

Population Statistics

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the latest estimates by the Registrar General of Populations of those aged 17 years and over, plus 63 per cent. of those aged 16 years, for each district council area and parliamentary constituency in England and Wales, together with the equivalent electoral registration figures also expressed as a percentage of these population figures and in ascending order. [41045]

Mrs. Angela Knight: As the information is contained in several tables, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

New Buildings and Premises

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by his Department and its agencies; and if he will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41150]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury has not incurred any expenditure on new buildings and premises in the last five year; 5505 sq m—59,250 sq ft—in Allington towers were taken over in 1993. Information relating to the Chancellor's agencies could not be assembled before Parliament is prorogued.

Unemployment Statistics

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have experienced unemployment, by Employment Service area office, in each region since April 1992. [41170]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Figures for separate Employment Service jobcentres could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the figures for each standard statistical region are contained in the following table.

Number of people experiencing at least one spell of claimant unemployment since April 1992

Thousands

Region	*Female*	*Male*	*All*
South East	1,082.1	2,040.7	3,122.8
East Anglia	112.4	212.4	324.7
South West	277.3	517.5	794.8
West Midlands	314.1	600.2	914.3
East Midlands	224	429.4	653.4
Yorkshire and Humberside	298.3	579.4	877.7
North West	386.1	760	1,146.1
North	181.4	376.7	558.1
Wales	159.9	315.7	475.6
Scotland	325.8	603.6	929.4
Great Britain	3,361.3	6,435.4	9,796.7

Source:
JUVOS cohort. excludes clerically operated claims.

Abortion

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the statistically most likely candidate for an abortion within the Trent region after the 24th week of pregnancy in the latest year for which figures are available in terms of *(a)* the age of the women, *(b)* marital status of the women, *(c)* the number of previous children of the women and *(d)* the grounds on which the abortion is performed. [40857]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The statistically most likely candidate for an abortion for each of the variables listed is defined as the category with the highest recorded frequency of legal terminations. The percentages are based on all legal terminations performed in 1994, to women usually resident in the Trent health region.

The categories with the highest frequencies found in each of the variables are as follows:

age of the women: 25 to 29 age group comprised 50 per cent. (4) of all post 24th week gestation terminations;

marital status: married women comprised 88 per cent. (7) of all post 24th week gestation terminations;

number of previous children borne by the women: women with no previous (live and still born) children born to them, comprised 50 per cent. (4) of all post 24th week gestation terminations;

legal ground under which the abortion was performed: statutory ground E alone comprised 88 per cent. (7) of all post 24th week gestation terminations. The definition of ground E is 'that there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped'.

Reference: 1994 Abortion Statistics, England and Wales, Series AB No. 21, HMSO publication 1996.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make statement on the statistically most likely candidate for an abortion within the Trent region in the latest year for which figures are available in terms of *(a)* the age of the woman, *(b)* marital status of the woman, *(c)* the number of previous children of the woman and *(d)* the grounds on which the abortion is performed. [40858]

Mrs. Knight: The statistically most likely candidate for an abortion for each of the variables listed is defined as the category with the highest recorded frequency of legal terminations. The percentages are based on all legal terminations performed in 1994, to women usually resident in the Trent health region.

The categories with the highest frequencies found in each of the variables are as follows:

age of the woman: 20 to 24 age group comprised 29 per cent. (3,463) of all terminations;

marital status: single women comprised 64 per cent. (7,570) of all terminations;

number of previous children borne by the woman: women with no previous (live and still born) children born to them, comprised 50 per cent. (5,923) of all terminations;

legal ground under which the abortion was performed: statutory ground C alone comprised 86 per cent. (10,143) of all terminations. The definition of ground C is "that the pregnancy has not exceeded its 24th week and that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated, of injury to the physical or mental health of the woman".

Reference: 1994 Abortion Statistics, England and Wales, Series AB No. 21, HMSO publication 1996.

Lone parents

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what proportion of single lone mothers are in *(a)* part–time work, *(b)* full–time work and *(c)* all paid work; [41023]

(2) how many children are in families headed by *(a)* single lone mothers, *(b)* divorced or separated lone mothers, *(c)* widowed lone mothers and *(d)* lone fathers; and what were the figures five years previously; [41003]

(3) what proportion of one–parent families are *(a)* single lone mothers, *(b)* divorced or separated lone mothers, *(c)* widowed lone mothers and *(d)* lone fathers by English region. [41013]

(4) how many lone parents under 25 years of age are *(a)* in paid work, *(b)* economically active and *(c)* economically inactive; [41019]

(5) what proportion of lone parents are economically active; [41007]

(6) what proportion of one–parent families are headed by *(a)* single lone mothers, *(b)* divorced or separated lone mothers, *(c)* widowed lone mothers and *(d)* lone fathers (i) in total and (ii) in each region; and what were the figures five years previously; [41005]

(7) what proportion of widowed lone mothers are in *(a)* part-time work, *(b)* full-time work and *(c)* all paid work; [40894]

(8) what proportion of lone parents are economically active, by English region; [41024]

(9) how many children are currently in one-parent families; [41004]

(10) how many one-parent families there were in each of the last five years; [41014]

(11) how many lone parents are under 25 years of age; [41020]

(12) what proportion of families in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were one-parent families in each of the last 10 years; [41001]

(13) what proportion of families were one-parent families in each of the last 10 years *(a)* in total and *(b)* by English region; [41008]

(14) how many one-parent families are there *(a)* in England by region, *(b)* in Scotland, *(c)* in Wales and *(d)* in Northern Ireland; [41006]

(15) how many lone parents there are whose youngest child is over five years old; [41016]

(16) how many children are in families headed by *(a)* single lone mothers, *(b)* divorced or separated lone mothers, *(c)* widowed lone mothers and *(d)* lone fathers by English region; [41002]

(17) what proportion of lone fathers are in *(a)* part-time work, *(b)* full-time work and *(c)* all paid work. [40895]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I cannot answer substantively before Parliament is prorogued. I will, however, write to the hon. Member.

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if pensioner households mainly dependent on state benefits are included in the calculation of weights which form the basis of the retail prices index. [41011]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Pensioner households mainly dependent on state benefits are not included in the calculation of the weights used in the retail prices index.

The retail prices index excludes pensioners deriving at least three-quarters of their income from state pensions and benefits. Pensioners are excluded as their spending patterns differ significantly from those of a typical household. However, the Office for National Statistics does compile pensioner price indices to cover these households on a quarterly basis.

Details of the weights used are published each year in the retail prices index "Business Monitor", MM23. An article explaining how the weights were calculated for 1996 was published in the February 1996 issue which is available from the House of Commons Library.

Policy Making (Resource Implications)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the full text of the Treasury guideline mentioned in paragraph 13 of Cm 2948, which requires that when any Government Department is considering policy it considers the resource implications for other Departments. [41215]

Mr. Waldegave: I cannot answer substantively before Parliament is prorogued. I will, however, write to the hon. Member.

Alcohol and Tobacco

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the most recent estimate he has received of the loss of excise duty through smuggling *(a)* alcohol and *(b)* tobacco. [41219]

Mr. Oppenheim: Customs and Excise published estimates of revenue evasion through smuggling on 19 September. The actual loss to the Exchequer will be less than the amount of revenue evaded, as some smuggling is likely to represent additional consumption, rather than substituting for similar goods bought in the UK. Customs' estimates for the annual revenue—excise duty and VAT—evaded are *(a)* £210 million for alcohol and *(b)* £560 million for tobacco products. This amount represents less than 5 per cent. of the annual total excise duty and VAT collected on alcohol and tobacco. These figures do not include amounts for commercial fraud—where revenue is evaded by use of false documentation.

Nursing Home Fees

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to introduce tax relief on the whole or part of payments by patients in registered nursing homes of their fees. [41198]

Mr. Jack: I cannot answer substantively before Parliament is prorogued. I will, however, write to my hon. Friend.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what capacity of electricity used in his Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans he has to increase that capacity. [41311]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I cannot answer substantively before Parliament is prorogued. I will, however, write to the hon. Member.

Property Improvement

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce tax concessions to smaller landlords to improve their properties following the new conditions arising from the Housing Act 1996; and if he will make a statement. [41331]

Mr. Jack: I cannot answer substantively before Parliament is prorogued. I will, however, write to my hon. Friend.

Lost Revenue

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the amount of revenue lost by the Exchequer due to the facilities provided for *(a)* individual United Kingdom citizens and *(b)* companies operating in the United Kingdom on each of (i) Jersey, (ii) Guernsey, (iii) the Isle of Man, (iv) Gibraltar, (v) the British Virgin Islands, (vi) the Cayman Islands and (vii) other overseas United Kingdom dependent territories; what measures have been considered to recover such lost revenue; and if he will make a statement. [41244]

Mr. Jack: I cannot answer substantively before Parliament is prorogued. I will, however, write to the hon. Member.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much capital spending by (i) the private sector and (ii) the public sector in the current financial year *(a)* he projected at the time of the 1995 Budget and *(b)* he projects now in respect of projects under the private finance initiative; [41337]

(2) how much capital spending has so far been committed by (i) the private sector and (ii) the public sector for the current financial year in respect of projects under the private finance initiative. [41338]

Mr. Jack: I cannot answer substantively before Parliament is prorogued. I will, however, write to the hon. Member.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number, nature and value of contracts awarded by his Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton, BDO Stoy Hayward, Pannel Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996. [37317]

Mr. Boswell: During the financial year 1995–96, my Department entered into two contracts with Deloitte Touche, both in connection with the Department's data communications strategy study, at a total cost of £130,988. One contract with BDO Stoy Hayward dealt with the monitoring of Dairy Crest activities for 1993–94 and April-October 1995, and one contract with Ernst and Young was concerned with the implementation of the Ministry's resource accounting and management information system. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, I cannot disclose the value of these two contracts. There were no contracts with the other companies named in the question.

ADAS employed the services of KPMG for a benchmarking seminar, Price Waterhouse for a privatisation feasibility project and Grant Thornton for VAT advice. The aggregate value of these three contracts was £7,002.

The Veterinary Laboratories Agency spent £18,689.35 in the calendar year 1995 with Price Waterhouse. This was all for merger-associated work including strategy development for the new agency. No other contracts were entered into with the organisations named in the period referred to.

I have asked the chief executive of Central Science Laboratory to provide a separate reply in respect of his use of the consultancy firms concerned.

Letter from P. I. Stanley to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 16 October 1996:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your question about contracts awarded to given companies and their subsidiaries and associates during the financial year 1995/96, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.[37317]

During the year in question two contracts totalling £6147 in value were awarded to Price Waterhouse for work involving a Review of Future Management and a Team Building Workshop. No contracts were awarded to any of the other companies listed.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Montserrat

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the total sum spent on emergency relief in Montserrat in the last year; and if he will make a statement on forthcoming assistance in the next six months. [40845]

Dr. Fox: Since July 1995, when the volcanic emergency on Montserrat began, we have committed £8.5 million on a wide variety of projects, many of which are ongoing.

In August this year, my right hon. and noble Friend, Baroness Chalker, announced an additional £25 million package of assistance to Montserrat covering the period from April 1996 to March 1998. These funds will be used to maintain essential Government services in Montserrat and to improve the infrastructure in the North of the island which the scientists regard as at minimal risk from volcanic hazard. Specific projects include upgrading and temporary hospital facilities, additional classrooms for primary and secondary school children, power generation, water distribution and watershed protection, the improvement of roads, alternative port facilities and the establishment of a permanent observatory to monitor volcanic activity. Copies of the announcement and background note have been laid in the Libraries of both Houses. The permanent secretary of the Overseas Development Administration visited Montserrat on 4 and 5 October to review progress.

I pay tribute to the remarkable courage and forbearance of the people of Montserrat who had to endure difficult and stressful conditions for many months because of the volcanic activity.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Disorder

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the ability of the relevant authorities to control public disorder; and if he will make a statement. [40137]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

New Buildings and Premises

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by her Department and its agencies; and if she will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41139]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested on expenditure on new buildings and premises could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The square footage of new office space purchased, including what has been constructed, or newly rented for the Northern Ireland civil service general office estate in each of the last five years is as follows:

	Square footage
1991–92	59,580
1992–93	106,730
1993–94	257,700
1994–95	72,430
1995–96	129,675

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41183]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Plastic Bullets

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the result of the Independent Commission for Police Complaints into the use of plastic bullets in Keady, County Armagh during the last weekend in July; and if he will make a statement. [41034]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Population Statistics

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the latest estimates of those aged 17 years and over, plus 63 per cent. of those aged 16 years, for each parliamentary constituency in Northern Ireland, together with the equivalent electoral registration figures also expressed as a percentage of these population figures and in ascending order. [41046]

Sir John Wheeler: The 1991 electoral ward population figures taken from the Northern Ireland census, aggregated to parliamentary constituencies are as follows. Subsequent mid-year estimates are provided at district council level only and not broken down by age. Consequently the equivalent electoral registration figures shown relate to September 1991.

Parliamentary constituency	*Column 1. Population aged 17 and over plus 63 per cent. of population aged 16 years*	*Column 2. Registered electors*	*Column 2 as a percentage of column 1*
Belfast South	55,368	52,556	94.9
South Antrim	71,334	68,292	95.7
Lagan Valley	76,053	73,688	96.9
East Londonderry	78,930	76,912	97.4
Belfast East	54,655	53,375	97.7
Strangford	71,468	69,855	97.7
South Down	78,592	77,371	98.4
East Antrim	64,621	63,739	98.6
Foyle	77,264	75,970	98.8
North Antrim	71,096	70,217	98.8
Mid Ulster	71,186	70,410	98.9
North Down	70,201	69,604	99.1
Upper Bann	68,675	68,422	99.6
Newry and Armagh	68,837	68,716	99.8
Belfast West	54,960	55,280	100.6
Belfast North	54,931	55,587	101.2
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	70,489	71,472	101.4
Total	1,158,660	1,141,466	98.5

Work is currently in progress to produce 1991 census data for the parliamentary constituencies as defined by the

Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland. These data will be deposited in the House of Commons Library in due course.

Nursery Places

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimate for unmet need for nursery places in Northern Ireland. [41054]

Mr. Ancram: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Prisoners (Unescorted Release)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will make it his policy that when high risk prisoners are given temporary unescorted release *(a)* the airports they are expected to use and *(b)* the police of the area to which they are to travel are informed in advance; [41206]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 14 October about the temporary release of unescorted high risk prisoners, when he last reviewed policy on the matter; and when the next review is planned. [41207]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Prisons Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alan Shannon. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Shannon to Mr. Alfred Morris, dated 17 October 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to the two Parliamentary Questions which you tabled about policy in relation to the unescorted temporary release of high risk prisoners.

You asked about the review of policy. Issues relating to risk are considered whenever changes in temporary release mechanisms are contemplated. The last significant change in compassionate release arrangements was in June 1995. The last significant change in escorting arrangements was in 1983. Policy in relation to unescorted release is currently being reviewed in the light of Liam Hefferman's failure to return from leave.

You asked about notification. This is an operational matter for the police.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what capacity of electricity used in his Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans he has to increase that capacity. [41316]

Sir John Wheeler: At present no buildings have combined heat and power plants.

Handguns

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what changes he plans to make to the legislation on the ownership and use of handguns; [41350]

(2) what are the implications of proposed changes to the legislation on the ownership and use of handguns for retired security forces personnel. [41349]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

New Buildings and Premises

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by her Department and its agencies; and if she will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41140]

Mr. Sproat: My Department and its agencies have incurred expenditure of approximately £4,800,000 on new buildings and premises. Within the last five years 66,798 sq ft of new office space was acquired.

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) how many people qualified for concessionary television licences in each year since 1990 in the area covered by the Govan parliamentary constituency; [41208]

(2) how many people qualified for concessionary television licences in each year since 1990 in the area covered by Glasgow city council. [41209]

Mr. Sproat: The BBC, as licensing authority, is responsible for the administration of the television licensing system, including the maintenance of detailed licence records and the determination of eligibility for concessionary licences. We understand that the sort of information that the hon. Member requests is held only by individual scheme and by category of concessionary scheme.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what plans she has to review concessionary television licences for the elderly; [41210]

(2) what assessment she has made of the advantages of relaxing the criteria for concessionary television licences, which restrict eligibility to those living within a group of at least four dwellings which fall within a common and exclusive boundary, in order to allow a larger number of individuals to qualify; [41212]

(3) pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) of 20 June, *Official Report*, column *567*, when and how she proposes to overcome the difficulties caused by a whole housing scheme applying for a concessionary television licence but who are ineligible solely because of the ownership circumstance of a small proportion of dwellings within its boundary. [41225]

Mr. Sproat: The concessionary television licence is available to retirement pensioners and disabled people living in nursing or residential homes. It also extends to certain sheltered accommodation which meets a number of qualifying criteria and is directly comparable to a residential home.

At Committee stage of the Broadcasting Bill, the Government undertook to address a specific anomaly whereby some sheltered housing schemes which meet all the other qualifying criteria fail to qualify for the concession because a small number of units within the scheme were purchased under the right-to-buy provisions before the accommodation was designated as sheltered

housing. We intend to bring forward new consolidated television licensing regulations before the end of the year, and they will address this anomaly.

There are no plans for any wider changes to the concessionary scheme. As was said in the 1994 White Paper "The Future of the BBC", Cm 2621, the Government believe that the right way to help the less well-off, of all ages, is through the welfare and benefit system.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what concessionary television licence schemes are in place for retired people in other countries of the European Union; and if she will consider adopting any of those which she assesses to be an improvement on that presently offered in the United Kingdom. [41211]

Mr. Sproat: The Government do not have this information. Television broadcasting arrangements, including the size of the public sector broadcasters and the services they provide, vary widely from one EC country to another. Direct comparisons of this kind are therefore not always appropriate and our policy in this area is, and will continue to be, based on the circumstances which prevail in the United Kingdom.

National Lottery

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on when she expects to reach a decision in respect of the target group to be supported by the £100 million set aside from national lottery proceeds for sports development. [40851]

Mr. Sproat: The Sports Council is the statutory distributor in England of lottery funds for good causes in sport. I do not have any role in the distribution process itself. To date, the Sports Council has awarded £305 million of lottery funds to 1,537 projects.

Bronze Age Village (East London)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what have been the results to date of English Heritage's excavations into the bronze age village at Brisbane road, east London; and if she will make a statement. [40883]

Mr. Sproat: The archaeological evaluation has revealed several post holes, one dated to the bronze age, and a drain of possibly medieval or earlier date. The evaluation has helped to confirm the extent of the site of a bronze age village in the area which was identified in a nearby excavation two years ago, and the possible existence of other archaeological deposits in the surrounding area.

Historic Churches

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the grants made by the Millennium Commission to churches built before 1900. [41230]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to my hon. Friend in my capacity as chairman of the Commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are her latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for her Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41182]

Mr. Sproat: My Department and agencies use consultants for a wide variety of tasks, only a small proportion of which are aimed at achieving cost savings. No central record is held on overall savings and it would not be possible to isolate those consultancies and quantify the cost savings without incurring disproportionate cost. The available information, in 1996 prices, is given in the following table:

	1992–93 (actual) £	*1993–94 (actual)* £	*1994–95 (actual)* £	*1995–96 (actual)* £	*1996–97 (estimate)* £
Department of National Heritage	1,286,964	1,613,144	478,806	304,632	200,824
Historic Royal Palaces agency	3,170,177	3,865,641	1,414,408	677,000	1,906,112
Royal Parks agency	[1]n/a	780,004	868,548	771,986	201,760

[1] The Royal Parks agency was not formed until April 1993.

Academy of Sport

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she proposes a single national academy of sport; and if she will make a statement. [40852]

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what criteria she proposes to lay down for the establishment of a sporting centre of excellence. [41239]

Mr. Sproat: Details of the Government's proposals for the British Academy of Sport, as the pinnacle of a regional network of centres of sporting excellence and academies for particular sports, are included in the bid prospectus which was published on 24 July. Bidders have until 31 October to submit their bids.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what capacity of electricity used in her Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans she has to increase that capacity. [41326]

Mr. Sproat: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Yorkshire County Cricket Club

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the advice given by the Sports Council to Yorkshire county cricket club in respect of relocation from Headingley to Wakefield. [41205]

Mr. Sproat: The Sports Council has provided advice on technical issues associated with the relocation, in particular how Yorkshire county cricket club might assess the proposals for relocation to Wakefield. The council has also reminded the club that at present lottery applications for spectator accommodation have relatively low priority; and that the development of a new ground must be seen within the context of the strategy for the development of test match cricket, which is currently being developed by the Test and County Cricket Board, and due for publication next month.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

School Transport

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what instructions have been issued to Office for Standards in Education inspectors in respect of *(a)* school transport and *(b)* the end of the three for two concession. [40743]

Mrs. Gillan: Instructions to inspectors are a matter for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools. He has responsibility for arranging the inspection of all state-maintained schools. Ofsted inspectors have not specifically been instructed in respect of *(a)* school transport or *(b)* the three for two concession. They are, however, required to report on any health and safety problems related to individual schools which they note in the course of inspections.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will investigate how schools and local education authorities are successfully implementing the end of the three for two concession; and if she will make a statement. [40744]

Mrs. Gillan: The ending of the three for two concession applies to specified categories of vehicles where seatbelts are fitted. There is a legal requirement and there is, therefore, no choice about its implementation.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance has been issued to local education authorities and schools by the Health and Safety Executive in respect of *(a)* school transport and *(b)* the removal of the three to two concession. [40741]

Mr. Bowis: I have been asked to reply.

No advice has been issued by the Health and Safety Executive. My Department will shortly by publishing advice notes on seat belts in school transport. These will include advice on the removal of the three for two concession and will be distributed to local authorities.

Jobcentres

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will list the jobcentres of South Yorkshire currently scheduled for closure; [4086]

(2) how many jobcentre service points have been closed in the past year; and in which areas. [40884]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I will ask him to arrange for a reply to be given and place a copy of his answer in the Library.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what instructions were given by her Department on the marking by Employment Service staff of the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance; and what is the estimated total cost of the events held to coincide with the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance. [40961]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I will ask him to arrange for a reply to be given and place a copy of his answer in the Library.

Breakthrough Initiative

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what percentage of unemployed people who have not used services provided by the breakthrough initiative in north Staffordshire in the last 12 months have moved into employment; [41114]

(2) what assessment has been made of the success of the breakthrough initiative, undertaken between the employment service in north Staffordshire and Staffordshire training and enterprise council; [41113]

(3) what is the operating cost of the breakthrough initiative in north Staffordshire; [41115]

(4) how many unemployed people have used services provided by the breakthrough initiative in north Staffordshire in the last 12 months; and what percentage of these have subsequently moved into employment. [41116]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I will ask him to arrange for a reply to be given and place a copy of his answer in the Library.

Training

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of people leaving Government-supported training in Yorkshire since September 1994 obtained a full-time job in a field closely related to that in which they received training. [40967]

Mr. Paice: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Female Employment

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her latest estimate of the number of women in work in Leeds, West *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time; and what percentage of the work force these figures constitute. [41284]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

I cannot answer substantively before Parliament is prorogued. I will, however, write to the hon. Member.

Full-time Education

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* 16-year-olds and *(b)* 17-year-olds were in full-time education at school or college in the January of each since 1985. [40759]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 16 October 1996]:* I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 16 July, *Official Report,* column *466,* what is the total cash value of vouchers issued to parents but not redeemed, in each of the four pilot authorities; and if the cash value of the unredeemed vouchers will be retained by the Exchequer. [40575]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 16 October 1996]:* I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what will be the cost of the publicity measures relating to the national implementation of the voucher scheme, as announced by her Department on 24 July, identifying separately the costs under the headings *(a)* poster campaigns, *(b)* leaflets and other publications, *(c)* television and radio advertising, *(d)* newspaper and journal advertisements, *(e)* specialist mailing, *(f)* seminars and *(g)* other. [40541]

Mr. Squire: The estimated budget for publicity about the nursery voucher scheme up to its initial implementation is £1,900,000. This will provide information for parents and providers of nursery education which will enable them to participate fully in this new scheme.

The figure is broken down in the table:

	£
Posters, leaflets and other publication	475,000
TV and radio advertising	850,000
Newspaper and journal advertisements	50,000
Specialist mailings	100,000
Seminars and exhibitions	40,000
Other	385,000

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the annual cost of administering the nursery voucher scheme. [41028]

Mr. Squire: The cost of administering the nursery education voucher scheme will be around £15 million over three years, that is an annual cost of around £5 million—a cost of less than £10 per child.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many four-year-olds were eligible to receive a voucher during the first term of phase one of the voucher scheme in *(a)* Kensington and Chelsea, *(b)* Westminster, *(c)* Wandsworth and *(d)* Norfolk; and of these, how many, expressed as a number and as a percentage of the above, redeemed a voucher in that term. [40577]

Mr. Squire: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many extra nursery places the nursery voucher scheme has created in *(a)* the public sector and *(b)* the private sector. [41029]

Mr. Squire: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Training for Work

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what are the results of the training for work leavers survey for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, for the periods between April 1994 and March 1995 and April 1995 and March 1996, for all leavers and separately for male and female, for each ethnic group, and for those with a disability or health problem, broken down to show the number and proportion of Training for Work leavers who *(a)* have been entered for a vocational qualification, *(b)* had obtained a vocational qualification, *(c)* had failed to obtain a vocational qualification, and *(d)* were awaiting their results; [41087]

(2) what was the number and proportion of training for work leavers who six months after leaving were *(a)* in a full-time job with their work experience employer, *(b)* in a full-time job with another employer, *(c)* employed in their own business, *(d)* in a part-time job, *(e)* in voluntary work, *(f)* on another Government training programme, *(g)* on a full-time education or training course, *(h)* unemployed and claiming benefit, *(i)* unemployed and not claiming benefit, *(j)* in a job club and *(k)* doing something else; and what is the number and proportion of training for work leavers who had completed the training agreed in their initial action plan; [41088]

(3) what are the results of the youth training leavers survey for the period December 1994 to January 1996 for each training and enterprise council area in England and Wales and each local enterprise council area in Scotland, broken down to show the number and proportion of youth training leavers who were *(a)* in full-time work with the same employer, *(b)* in full-time work with a different employer, *(c)* in part-time work, *(d)* on a full-time course at a college or training centre, *(e)* on another youth training scheme, *(f)* doing something else, *(g)* unemployed and *(h)* had obtained a vocational qualification; and what was (i) the number of questionnaires issued, (ii) the usable percentage response and (iii) the percentage of respondents who were early leavers; [41089]

(4) what are the results from the training for work leavers survey for the period December 1994 to January 1996 for each training and enterprise council area in England and Wales and each local enterprise council area in Scotland, broken down to show the number and proportion of leavers who *(a)* had been entered for a vocational qualification, *(b)* had obtained a vocational qualification, *(c)* had failed to obtain a vocational qualification and *(d)* were awaiting their results; [41090]

(5) what was the number and proportion of training for work leavers who, six months after leaving were *(a)* in a full-time job with their work experience employer, *(b)* in a full-time job with another employer, *(c)* employed in their own business, *(d)* in a part-time job, *(e)* in voluntary work, *(f)* on another Government training programme, *(g)* on a full-time education or training course, *(h)* unemployed and claiming benefit, *(i)* unemployed and not claiming benefit, *(j)* in a job club and *(k)* doing something else; and what is the number and proportion of training for work leavers who had completed the training agreed in their initial action plan; [41091]

(6) what is the number and proportion of trainees who six months after leaving were *(a)* in a full-time job with their work experience employer, *(b)* in a full-time job with another employer, *(c)* employed in their own business, *(d)* in a part-time job, *(e)* in voluntary work, *(f)* on another Government training programme, *(g)* on a full-time education or training course, *(h)* unemployed and claiming benefit, *(i)* unemployed and not claiming benefit, *(j)* in a job club and *(k)* doing something else; and if she will base her reply on data set out in the youth training leavers survey for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, for the periods April 1994 to March 1995 and April 1995 to March 1996, (i) in total and (ii) broken down, *(l)* by gender, (2) by ethnic group and (3) to show those with a disability or health problem. [41110]

Mr. Paice: As the reply will consist of a large amount of data, I will write to the hon. member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Education Spending

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much was available for the local education authority in Doncaster to spend on each pupil, in *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97. [40983]

Mr. Robin Squire: Local authorities are free to determine their own levels of spending on pupils within their total budgets. The per pupil allowances in the education component of Doncaster's standard spending assessment are as follows:

	Primary £	*Secondary* £
1994–95	1,943	2,717
1995–96	1,934	2,572
1996–97	2,039	2,719

Employment Service

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on the basis of what criteria decisions are taken to close or merge Employment Service offices which are used by the public seeking jobs. [40885]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I will ask him to arrange for a reply to be given and place a copy of his answer in the Library.

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment her Department has made of the advantage of widening the role of the Employment Service to provide information about education and training, careers guidance and basic skills work. [41118]

Mr. Forth: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are her latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for her Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41185]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information in the form requested could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Pupils (South Yorkshire)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list by local authority, the number of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary pupils resident in South Yorkshire who attended schools in local authorities other than the one in which they live, in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [40907]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows the number of pupils resident in each authority who attended maintained schools elsewhere in the years 1992 to 1994. No data are available for other years.

Local authority	*5 to 10 years*	*11 to 15 years*	*Over 16 years*
January 1992			
Barnsley	128	516	95
Doncaster	72	372	31
Rotherham	83	153	24
Sheffield	205	571	58
January 1993			
Barnsley	147	584	80
Doncaster	77	398	39
Rotherham	91	165	23
Sheffield	247	685	75
January 1994			
Barnsley	173	645	86
Doncaster	102	433	47
Rotherham	89	131	15
Sheffield	247	777	93

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each training and enterprise council its budget for 1996–97 and the total national budget for 1996–97. [40753]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 16 October 1996]:* The Budget made available to each training and enterprise council in England by the Department for 1996–97, is shown in the following table. The responsibility for TECs in Wales lies with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

TEC budgets 1996–97

	£
South East	
Hampshire	30,613,244
Heart of England	12,553,959
Isle of Wight	3,425,755
Kent	37,316,989
Milton Keynes and North Bucks.	12,378,636
Surrey	11,783,484
Sussex	23,321,317
Thames Valley Enterprise	32,743,951
London	
AZTEC	12,911,673
CENTEC	39,613,016
CILNTEC	20,079,556
London East	33,842,707
North London	20,951,858
North West London	11,521,119
SOLOTEC	32,091,223
West London	19,647,823
Eastern	
Bedfordshire	12,813,995
CAMBSTEC	8,501,107
Essex	32,464,679
Greater Peterborough	11,812,797
Hertfordshire	19,218,027
Norfolk and Waveney	23,012,460
Suffolk	15,471,411
South West	
Devon and Cornwall	44,193,093
Dorset	15,981,316
Gloucestershire	14,483,472
Somerset	12,319,729
WESTEC	29,171,124
Wiltshire	11,430,830
West Midlands	
Birmingham	35,805,764
Central England	9,455,354
Coventry and Warwickshire	24,591,969
Dudley	9,644,020
HAWTEC	12,693,078
Sandwell	12,529,198
Shropshire	13,690,389
Staffordshire	30,152,515
Walsall	7,682,769
Wolverhampton	10,285,694
East Midlands	
Greater Nottingham	18,953,357
Leicester	23,458,251
Lincolnshire	25,684,831
North Derbyshire	11,228,429
North Nottinghamshire	17,727.529
Northamptonshire	13,683,056
Southern Derbyshire	17,766,331

TEC budgets 1996–97

	£
Yorkshire and the Humber	
Barnsley and Doncaster	21,921,110
Bradford and District	16,938,463
Calderdale and Kirklees	19,044,942
Humberside	33,504,278
Leeds	19,450,577
North Yorkshire	17,094,843
Rotherham	11,019,135
Sheffield	20,200,688
Wakefield	10,573,996
North West	
Bolton and Bury	14,644,497
Cumbria	18,622,134
Eltec (East Lancs)	19,446,635
Lawtec (Lancs West)	27,530,418
Manchester	41,860,974
Metrotec Ltd. (Wigan)	10,501,214
Normidtec	16,020,122
Oldham	9,047,116
Rochdale	8,971,483
South and East Cheshire	14,087,755
Stockport/High Peak	11,685,608
Merseyside	
Cewtec	20,138,333
Merseyside	49,904,319
St. Helens (Qualitec)	8,592,371
North East	
County Durham	24,371,817
Northumberland	13,155,902
Sunderland City	15,895,573
Teesside	30,693,260
Tyneside	36,788,782
England	[1]1,462,409,229

Budgets as at August 1996. TEC Budgets comprise: Youth Programmes, FE Development and Competitiveness Fund.

Carry over from 1995–96 Contract of Careers Guidance and Careers Libraries, Work Experience pre-16, Training for Work (TfW), Pre-Vocational Pilots, Employer Investment in People, Out of School Childcare Initiative, Skills Challenge, Skills for Small Businesses, Performance Related Funding, Jobmatch, Management Fee.

YP—Youth Training, Modern Apprenticeships and Funding Pilots includes Accelerated Modern Apprenticeships carry over from 1995–96 Contract and excludes Additional Outputs Points Performance Pool.

TFW includes allowances and Adult Guidance, excludes re-allocated European Social Fund money.

TEC Discretionary Fund has been excluded from figures.

[1] England outturn 1995–96 £1,402,000 million.

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps her Department is taking to encourage partnerships between TECs and the employment service at a local level. [41117]

Mr. Paice: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Departmental Office (Runcorn)

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the contract for security services to cover the offices of the Department for Education and Employment office

in Runcorn indicating the name of the contractor, the total cost of the contract, and details of the wages and conditions of employment for the guards. [41136]

Mr. Robin Squire: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many answers to *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions have required correction by her Department in each of the past two years. [40630]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 16 October 1996]:* This is a matter of public record.

Exclusions and Expulsions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will publish for the last available four years for each local authority in South Yorkshire and for South Yorkshire as a whole the number of school exclusions or expulsions recorded for *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* all schools, indicating the percentage of exclusions and expulsions as a proportion in each case of overall pupil numbers. [40958]

Mr. Forth: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what capacity of electricity used in her Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans she has to increase that capacity. [41319]

Mr. Paice: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Grants (Children of Missionaries)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what arrangements are in place for grants to be provided for university education for the children of missionaries who have been working abroad; [40896]

(2) if she will list by faith, the arrangements in place for grants to be provided for university education for the children of missionaries who have been working abroad. [40824]

Mr. Forth: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

New Buildings and Premises

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by her Department and its agencies; and if she will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41146]

Mr. Robin Squire: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

A-level Science Students

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of 16-year-olds last year went on to study an A-level science subject, broken down by *(a)* region and *(b)* gender. [41286]

Mr. Paice: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my of my reply in the Library.

Free School Meals

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what percentage of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school children in each south Yorkshire local authority received free school meals in each year since 1989. [40826]

Mrs. Gillan: The information is shown in the following table.

Numbers and percentages of day pupils taking free school meals in maintained primary and secondary schools in South Yorkshire Metropolitan District: 1989–1996 (provisional)

Position in January each year

	1989		*1990*		*1991*		*1992*	
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Primary								
Barnsley	3,458	17	3,371	16	3,601	17	4,197	20
Doncaster	5,178	19	5,105	18	5,461	19	6,568	22
Rotherham	4,226	18	4,125	17	4,219	17	4,798	20
Sheffield	8,371	19	8,381	19	8,598	19	9,842	22
Secondary[1]								
Barnsley	1,560	11	1,461	11	1,278	11	1,442	12
Doncaster	2,385	11	2,060	10	2,057	10	2,699	13
Rotherham	1,699	9	1,511	9	1,441	8	1,723	10
Sheffield	2,902	11	2,745	11	2,716	11	3,278	14

[1] Figures for years prior to 1994 include Sixth Form Colleges.

Position in January each year

	1993		1994		1995		1996	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Primary								
Barnsley	4,702	22	4,891	23	4,838	22	4,770	22
Doncaster	7,089	24	7,196	24	6,986	24	7,412	24
Rotherham	5,147	21	5,424	22	5,465	22	5,598	22
Sheffield	9,887	23	10,105	23	9,943	22	10,290	22
Secondary[1]								
Barnsley	1,735	14	1,844	14	1,973	15	1,911	15
Doncaster	3,102	15	3,500	16	3,780	16	3,172	15
Rotherham	1,799	10	1,976	11	2,032	11	1,952	10
Sheffield	4,193	16	4,176	15	4,200	15	4,271	16

[1] Figures for years prior to 1994 include Sixth Form Colleges.

Student Loans

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was the cost of the production and circulation of *(a)* the invitation to tender documents prepared for the proposed twin-track student loan scheme, *(b)* the revised invitation to tender document and *(c)* any publicity material associated with the proposed scheme; [41247]

(2) if she will list the occasions on which she, her Ministry or departmental officials met with those private sector institutions which put forward bids under the proposed twin-track student loan scheme; [41248]

(3) for what reasons her Department was unable to come to an agreement for the introduction of publicity-subsidised private sector student loans under the proposed twin-track scheme; [41249]

(4) what is the planned timetable for the contracting out of the administrative work of the Student Loans Company; [41250]

(5) what is her Department's estimate of the public sector borrowing requirement effect of the proposed sale of student loan debts to the private sector and the contracting out of the administrative work of the Student Loans Company in 1996–97 and each relevant year thereafter; and if this includes revisions to forecasts made necessary by the cancellation of the twin-track scheme. [41305]

Mr. Forth: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Barnsley and Doncaster Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what percentage of the Barnsley and Doncaster TEC budget is currently spent on management training for small firms; and if she will make a statement; [40964]

(2) on how many occasions in the last 12 months the Barnsley and Doncaster TEC has been visited by officials from the European Commission Court of Auditors; for what reasons the visits were made; and what was the result of the visits. [40825]

Mr. Paice: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Aerodynamic Design and Electronic Engineers

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her Department's estimate of the demand for aerodynamic design and electronic engineers over the next two years; and how many training places are available on courses. [40939]

Mr. Paice: The Department does not collect information about the demand for specific technologist occupations nor about the training places available to provide for such skills; such information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

SCOTLAND

Statistical Information

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what categories of statistical information his Department collects in respect of the new parliamentary constituencies; what plans he has to collect similar information for the new constituencies to that currently collected for the existing constituencies; what categories he intends his Department to collect in future; and if he will make a statement. [40154]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Currently it is only electoral statistical information which is specifically collected for the new constituencies. Some of this information has already been published in the ONS Monitor EL 96/2 which is available in the Library. Further information will appear in the ONS volume "Electoral Statistics 1996" to be published towards the end of the year. We shall continue to collect the same information on the new constituencies as is currently collected for the present constituencies.

A census monitor, published by the General Register Office for Scotland (GRO(S)) on 30 September 1996, presented selected data from the 1991 census for each of the new constituencies. GRO(S) can also provide information on vital events such as births and deaths for the new constituencies using analysis by postcode.

Bee Diseases

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the letter from the Under-Secretary, the Minister with responsibility for agriculture and forestry and the environment, of 15 July, if he will make a

statement on his co-operation with the bee-keeping community on monitoring and diagnostic tests in relation to varroa and other bee diseases. [40369]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 14 October 1996]:* The Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department undertakes focused inspection of bee colonies in the spring and autumn of each year to confirm the continued absence of the varroa mite in Scotland. Similar action is taken each year in the areas outwith the statutory infested area in England to establish spread of disease and, if necessary, to redefine that area from which it is illegal to move bees without prior authorisation and inspection. More generally, the Scottish Office Agriculture Services Agency provides diagnostic and treatment advice on the statutorily controlled bee diseases for subsequent inspection and remedial action as necessary. Bee-keepers can also seek advice on non-statutory bee diseases from the Scottish agricultural college.

Methadone Prescriptions

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of methadone prescriptions for drug addicts for each health board area for the most recent available 12-month period; if he will express this as a cost per 1,000 of the population; what guidance is given on the prescription of methadone; and if he will make a statement. [40677]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Alcoholic Lemonade

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding the sale of alcoholic lemonade and other alcopops to under-age persons; what action he has taken or proposes to take; and if he will make a statement. [40678]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Since October 1994, we have received representations from eight Members of Parliament, and from eight other correspondents, about the subject of alcoholic lemonades and other designer alcoholic products.

Officials have been discussing with the Portman group and other Government Departments how we might best address the problem of the marketing and sale of designer alcoholic drinks apparently targeted at under 18-year-olds. It was agreed that the issue should be tackled in the wider context of under-age drinking generally. A direct outcome of these discussions was the voluntary code of practice launched by the Portman group in April which sets out guidelines on the naming, packaging and merchandising of these products. The code has the full support of the leading United Kingdom drinks companies and a number of major retailers.

According to the Portman group's first report on the operation of the code, which was published on 2 October, there have been 28 complaints about 21 products. Complaints were upheld on four. We will continue to monitor the progress of these guidelines over the coming months.

The Scottish Office is also considering the introduction of experimental schemes in selected areas of Scotland in which the police would work closely with the community in addressing the sale and supply of alcohol to those who are under-age. Details of this initiative will be announced in due course.

General Practitioners

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the grants given to general practitioner out-of-hours co-operatives and other cover arrangements for each health board area in the financial year 1995–96 and projected expenditure for 1996–97. [40679]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Health boards were allocated totals of £4,967 million and £5.105 million in 1995–96 and 1996–97 respectively to provide for the reimbursement of certain expenses incurred by general practitioners in delivering out-of-hours services.

The totals were distributed between health boards on a *per capita* general practitioner basis as shown in the table.

£000

Health board	*1995–96 allocations*	*1996–97 allocations*
Argyll and Clyde	434	446
Ayrshire and Arran	365	375
Borders	109	112
Dumfries and Galloway	166	171
Fife	309	318
Forth Valley	281	288
Grampian	478	491
Greater Glasgow	887	911
Highland	255	262
Lanarkshire	470	483
Lothian	740	761
Orkney	34	35
Shetland	24	25
Tayside	371	381
Western Isles	44	46
Total	4,967	5,105

Cairngorms

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received in respect of preservation and conservation of the Cairngorms; and if he will make a statement. [40713]

Mr. Kynoch: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Blood Transfusion Services

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to increase co-operation between the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service and the national blood transfusion service; and if he will make a statement. [40776]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish National Blood Transfusion service and the National Blood Authority are responsible respectively for blood services in Scotland and England. However, regular contact is maintained and they co-operate in many ways.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the national director of the Scottish national blood transfusion service will be appointed; and if he will make a statement. [40775]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Pre-selection interviews for the appointment of a national director for the Scottish National Blood Transfusion service were held on 15 October. Final interviews of the shortlisted candidates will be held on 25 October. The successful candidate's subsequent appointment will be subject to negotiation and availability.

Promotional Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department has spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotion and *(c)* hospitality in each of the last six years. [40614]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The amount spent by my Department on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* promotion and *(c)* hospitality in each of the last six years is set out in the table.

Year	*Publicity/Promotions*[1] £	*Hospitality* £
1990–91	2,786,595	65,123
1991–92	2,887,153	83,836
1992–93	3,116,135	[2]125,118
1993–94	2,876,585	76,088
1994–95	3,141,383	79,510
1995–96	3,433,676	[3]82,978

[1] The figures include expenditure on advertising, printwork, exhibitions and educational material for Scottish Office paid for publicity campaigns, leaflets and publications. It is not possible to give a separate figure for promotions.
[2] This figure includes expenditure on hospitality during the EC Council Meeting in Edinburgh in December 1992.
[3] In addition, the Scottish Office spent £34,680 on the VE Day and VJ Day events in Edinburgh in May and August 1995.

Core and Cluster Facility (Orkney)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what response he has given to representations made to him by the Hoy Action Group in respect of the siting of a core and cluster facility at Longhope, Orkney. [40433]

Mr. James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 16 October 1996]:* The Scottish Office has responded to representations made on the action group's behalf of my right hon. Friend. The response indicated that Orkney health board's decision to locate the new facility at Longhope was reached after consultation with the local community and that, taking account of all relevant factors, the board's belief is that a site at Longhope will best address the community's needs in terms of service requirements and value for money.

Housing

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will set out for each district and islands council area for 1995–96 the total public expenditure in the categories of Scottish Homes approved development programme *(a)* housing association for rent, *(b)* housing association shared ownership, *(c)* housing association improvement for sale, *(d)* GRO grant for rent, *(e)* GRO grant for low cost home ownership and *(f)* total ADP; [41066]

(2) if he will set out for each district and islands council area for 1995–96 the total number of dwelling completions in the categories of Scottish Homes approved development programme, *(a)* housing associations for rent, *(b)* housing associations shared ownership, *(c)* housing associations improvement for sale, *(d)* GRO grant for rent, *(e)* GRO grant for low cost home ownership and *(f)* total ADP. [41061]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information requested is held by Scottish Homes. I shall ask its chairman, Mr. John Ward, to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the progress to date of the individual house purchase scheme established to assist the disabled in obtaining appropriate housing. [41213]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The individual house purchase scheme, which assists disabled people to buy—or rent—suitable homes, is operated by Margaret Blackwood housing association using funding provided by Scottish Homes. Scottish Homes is currently in discussion with the association on ways to improve the usefulness of the scheme.

Nursery Places

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimate for unmet need for nursery places in Scotland. [41052]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: This information is not held centrally. The most recent departmental information about nursery education and day nursery provision in Scotland is in two Scottish Office statistical bulletins: in the November 1994 "Survey of Day Care/Education Provision for Children in Scotland", published in March 1996; and in "Summary Results of the 1995 School Census", published in August 1996. Copies are in the Library.

New Buildings and Premises

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total expenditure on new buildings and premises by his Department and its agencies; and if he will indicate the square footage of new office space purchased or newly rented in each of the last five years. [41137]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1996 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in. [41186]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Government Expenditure and Revenue Document

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many copies of "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland 1993–94" were *(a)* produced and *(b)* distributed free of charge; what were the costs of the (i) design and (ii) printing and publishing of the document, what were the costs of producing the document in terms of staff research costs; what were the costs of (1) the launch and (2) publicity; and if he will make a statement. [41067]

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: The Scottish Office produced 5,000 copies of the publication "Government Expenditure and Revenues in Scotland 1993–94"–GERS—of which approximately 2,250 were distributed free of charge, excluding postage which the recipients had to pay. The cost of design, printing and publishing the document was £6,326.34 while the cost of the launch and publicity was £290.23. The cost of research staff time is unknown; the research for the document formed part of the normal duties of Government economists and statisticians.

The GERS publication is intended to provide a strictly factual contribution to the public understanding of budgetary issues in Scotland. In future, GERS will be updated annually to a pre-announced publication schedule. As has already been announced, the next edition covering the fiscal year 1994–95 will be published on Monday 21 October 1996.

Population Statistics

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the latest estimates of those aged 17 years and over, plus 63 per cent. of those aged 16 years, for each parliamentary constituency in Scotland, together with the equivalent electoral registration figures also expressed as a percentage of these population figures and in ascending order. [41047]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to he hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what capacity of electricity used in his Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans he has to increase that capacity. [41315]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 282**

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Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

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Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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